

VegvÃ-sir

by riverbard

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Summary: On her way to a peace treaty in the Orkney Isles Merida and her father are attacked at sea, when she comes to she finds herself surrounded by Vikings. With no knowledge of her Father's fate she tries figure out a way to get home, but when danger comes to Berk she must work together with the Viking Hiccup in order to change the fate of his village, as well as her homeland.

## 1. Chapter 1

\*\*Chapter 1\*\*

Merida closed her eyes for a moment and breathed deep the salty air of the sea. The ship rocked gently under her feet, but her hard won sea legs held true. The wind gusted, playing with her fiery curls, tempting them loose from her plait. She pulled her cloak a bit closer to her, it was a thick wool, simple in design, unlike her dark blue dress underneath with its delicate silver embroidery adorning the hem and bust. She didn't mind the modest fashion of the cloak, the beeswax coating on the outside kept the surf from seeping in and giving her a chill, and that was far more important on an ocean voyage.

She had been traveling with her father on a peace treaty to the Orkney Isles for the past month. Originally her mother was supposed to attend, while Merida kept the house in order, but three months before the trip was to take place Elinor had discovered she was pregnant and wouldn't be able to make the trip.

Merida didn't mind this turn of events, it gave her a chance to test her skills in diplomacy; something she had found a new appreciation for after her adventures with her mother two years ago. Elinor hadn't minded much either, as it would give Merida a chance to visit with the MacGuffin Clan.

Merida grimaced at the thought of her mother's scheming.

It wasn't that she didn't like the MacGuffin's; it was just the idea of marriage that still put her off. She hadn't made a choice yet, but even Merida recognized that she was reaching an age where she would have to settle. One of her prospects, Dingwald's son, had already married another lord's daughter to extend the families holdings to that of his neighbors. The other two families were growing impatient, but they had kept their word to allow her the choice. The two boys had spent a summer at her home in order to get to know her better and she them, but she had shied away from choosing by the time they had left.

The following year kept the people of Alba too busy for romance. Vikings, having not touched their lands for some years, had suddenly begun raiding the shores once more. When the summer raids had ended they had come knocking at her father's door again, now with a new sense of urgency. It was the other reason she had jumped at the chance to take this trip. While she would have to visit the MacGuffin's: for the remainder of the three months she would be free from having to make a choice.

Merida placed a calloused hand on the worn wooden railing of the ship, fingering the grooves and marks in the timber. She could see clearly the difference in age and experience had brought to her mindset when it came to the union. While she wasn't thrilled about it, she at least had the chance to make a choice of her own. She knew in her heart that she wanted someone that accepted her for who she was; her strengths, weakness, and someone that wouldn't try and cage her spirit.

After a moment she let loose a breath filled with resignation and deep sadness: she hadn't been able to escape this part of her fate entirely though. Of her possible suitors she had never felt any stirrings of love, but this was her duty and there was always the chance she would come to care for her future husband, whoever it might be.

She turned and rested her back against the side of the ship, looking up; she noticed the world around her had a developed a green twinge to it. The skies marked the coming of a storm, as throws of thick heavy clouds barreled towards them. It snapped her out of her thoughts immediately; she stood straight and took stock of her crew.

A shout came from the left. Merida looked towards her Father at the helm of the other ship, his large imposing shape was hard to miss, he had grown his beard out a bit more over the past two years, but otherwise remained the same. Next to him was a dark skinned man, wearing a simple cloth tunic, dark breeches, and around his waist was a sash baring the tartan of her clan. This was her father's his second in command, Peadar.

Peadar had come to Dunbroch shortly after her adventure and had forged a great friendship with her father over the years. His dark skin and short curly hair stood out amongst the rest of the crew, but to everyone he was a trusted and well-received sight when trouble was afoot. He had helped train Merida and her brothers, and spent time regaling them with tales of his many adventures across the World when he was a boy.

Merida waved in return to her father, showing him she had his attention. After two trips by boat she had convinced her father to allow her to take charge of the second ship. Her father hailed again and pointed towards the skies.

"Storms a comin' lass, we're gonna take the path North 'round the Isles. Should miss the belly o'it that way." Fergus bellowed.

Merida nodded her understanding; she turned and gave the commands to the crew.

She stepped off the raised platform and began to help them adjust the sails before giving the order to begin the drums. If they were going to clear the storm as fast as they could they would have to use the oars.

The wind buffeted them; she worked with the others on the sails, trying to keep the ship facing the winds head on. She knew that if they allowed the winds to attack them from the side they would risk keeling over.

She glanced over at her father's ship; he was keeping his boat as close to hers as he could; his eyes on her as often as he could spare a glance. He smiled broadly at her, displaying his pride in her abilities.

Returning the gesture she felt her confidence grow, she called out to the crew, egging them on to keep the fire in their bellies. They answered the Bear King's daughter with a roar and continued to push through the heavy waves created by the storm.

She looked up at the skies and saw the line between the heavy clouds on the right and clear blues on the left. The winds seemed to shift as they went on and she knew then that they would be clear of the worst of it as long as nothing took them off course. Merida eased up on the sails and called for the drummer to reduce speed. She looked over to her Father and saw him doing the same.

"Didcha see the size o'those clouds Da?" she hailed to him.

Fergus smiled at his daughter "Ay lass, t'was a face o'a beast. Ye did yer Father proud tho', yer a true Captain at heart!"

She was about to respond when the sound of a horn blasted through the air. Fergus and Merida turned their heads to the sound and saw two boats approaching them. At first she thought it was ships from the Orkney Isles; arriving to guide them the rest of the way to their port; but she soon recognized the colour of the sails and the shields lining the sides: Viking ships.

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2. Chapter 2

\*\*Chapter 2\*\*

Someone was calling her name. There were flashes of battle, Vikings against the men of her Clan. She was at the helm firing arrows into her foes, red hair streaming like a banner in the wind, finally free of its constraints. She had abandoned her cloak to make firing easier. She heard one of her men call an alarm, but it was already too late: a ship appeared to her left, aiming straight for the center of her vessel. Her craft made a bone-chilling crunch, as the blue waters of the ocean seeped in through the wound.

Merida called out to her men "Get to the other vessel!" Her Father had already directed his men to bring his ship closer to them. Merida's crew leapt overboard and swam towards Fergus. He was yelling for her while firing arrows at the Viking ship ahead of him.

She made to jump, but was caught by the sudden pull against her dress. Glancing down, she saw that she was caught between two broken boards of the floor. She tugged, but couldn't pull the fabric from the crushed wood. Water rushed in, soaking her and dragging her down further as she struggled for a post to grab hold of.

She looked over the rim of her ship and saw that the waves had started pulling her sinking ship farther away from her dad's. Before she lost view of her father she saw a body dive off his ship. Moments later Peadar surfaced, pulling his knife from his waist and hacking at the fabric binding her to the ship. He pulled her upright as the ship began to keel over. They leapt up to the starboard side, hauling themselves over the railing and onto the exposed side of the ship.

Peadar flashed her a smile, his teeth white against his dark skin, relaxing Merida instantly. "Looks like we're in fer a bit o' fun lass" he commented as the ship groaned, continuing its slow sink into the sea.

"We can make it to mah Fathers ship from here!" She stated, readying to dive. Peadar held her back.

"Wait ye wild child, yer skirts will go-a pullin' ye under as soon as ye land in the water" he stated, grimacing as he tried to keep his balance on the slippery side of the ship. "Yer Father is bringing his ship closer, he'll make it in time."

As he said that a very different ship heaved its' self between hers and her father's. The Vikings on the ship roared, what she assumed, were insults. The leader at the helm was large; he had a full grey beard braided in two. His thick arms flexed, the sleeveless top revealing scars and ink marked patterns along his biceps. He looked between Fergus and Merida before a light of joy reached his eyes.

"Well, well, if it isn't fable King and what, I think, is daughter" he said, his thick accent and broken Gaelic making it harder to understand him. Merida glared at him, Peadar's hand on her shoulder keeping her steady. The boat beneath them groaned again reminding her of the time limit the two of them had.

"Peadar, hand me yer knife quickly" she whispered to the man next to her. Knife in hand Merida didn't think twice before beginning to hack away at the thicker parts of her dress, her leggings and shift underneath would keep her modest enough while granting her a better

chance at swimming towards her fathers ship.

The Viking lord laughed at this sight. While pointing at Merida he looked back at Fergus "Your daughter is maybe interested in Yngvild" he said using his hands to beat his chest. The men on the ship laughed aloud. Merida did her best to hide the blush of embarrassment forming at her cheeks.

Fergus growled a string of insults and notched an arrow at the Viking, Yngvild, but stopped short of shooting when several of the archers on the Viking's ship took aim at Merida.

"Yngvild will take her, you will hold fire, yes?" he said, his men pulled out long poles with hooks on the end. They extended the hooks towards her sinking ship and pulled themselves closer to her. Merida fought the panic rising within her. The smell of fish and rot emanated from the Viking vessel causing bile to rise up in her throat.

She forced herself to stay focused, to come up with an idea as fast as she could. She looked towards the top of her ship, thinking to move farther away from the Vikings, but stopped when she saw a small blue flame. It whispered gently, bobbing up and down as it hovered over the prow of the ship before disappearing. "A will-o-the-wisp" she whispered in awe. She had not seen one since the time her mother had been turned into a bear.

There was a large crack from above, causing everyone to jump and look up. The sky was darkening quickly: the storm they had been fleeing had grown back towards them during the battle.

"Merida, we must jump now!" Peadar said, gesturing towards the sinking end of the ship. "They'll have to focus on getting outta this storm, we can take our chance and swim fer yer father's boat before the storm comes round." Merida nodded in agreement and, without looking back, leapt off the ship and into the cold waters below.

She fought against the chill seeping into her bones, the current toying with her, pulling her farther away from her goal. She focused on her father's ship and swam hard. Peadar was next to her; keeping his pace even with hers; even though she knew he was a better swimmer.

They struggled against the growing waves, her lungs burning with the effort, but she felt relief pass through her as she saw her father moving the ship towards them.

She spared a glance towards the Viking vessel and saw that Peadar had guessed right, they were focusing all of their effort to dislodge themselves from the nearly sunken ship in order to steer their boat so that it faced the wind.

Yngvild bellowed harsh, clipped words while pointing towards them. The crew tried to respond, but some of the hooks were trapped in the ship, delaying them. The Viking lord glared towards her, his eyes burning an oath of pain to come.

Merida forced her attention away from Yngvild and made a last push towards her father. His hands reached down, grabbing hold of her and pulling her aboard, leaving her side only long enough to help Peadar

onto the ship as well.

Once they were both aboard Fergus called out to his men to get the ship as far as they could from the Viking one. He pulled Merida close to him in a fierce bear hug, relief pouring into his voice as he thanked the Old Ones, something Fergus rarely did. She took a moment to process what had happened, her legs shaking; but whether from fear or the chill she didn't know.

Fergus wrapped her in his bear cloak and stood tall to focus on sailing the crew through the on coming storm.

"Men! Pull out the oars! Bring the sails up and get her facing the wind, last thing we want is to keel or lose our mast!" Fergus signaled the drum to beat, its sound dampened as rain broke from the clouds and began soaking them from above.

The waves increased in size and Merida found it hard to orient herself on the shaking boat. She held herself true though, and glanced towards the Viking ship. They had managed to pull themselves free of the wreckage and were preparing for the storm. She couldn't see Yngvild anymore through the wall of grey created by the falling rain. Slowly, the Viking ship was also swallowed and she was blind to their condition.

"I hope they keel over," she muttered. She would have a hard time forgetting the Viking Lords face and leering eyes.

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><p>As the storm raged on, the ship screeched in protest, but she held true. This was the first real storm Merida had ever experienced. She found herself clinging to the mast and gasping for air as waves buffeted those on board, the ocean in a rage reminding her of Maudie kneading dough. A spate of homesickness filled her bones in that moment and she found herself praying they would make it through the storm.</p>

Time seemed to crawl as they fought the elements. Merida saw the fear grow in some of the men, while the rest felt exhaustion stifle their effort. Fergus was alongside them working to keep the ship afloat while Peadar told her to rest as he took over making calls.

Merida could only guess where they were located now.

When they had first tried to flee the storm they had been close to the east coast of the Orkney Isles, but had detoured to avoid the oncoming storm. Being waylaid by Vikings hadn't helped with that and now she was convinced they were lost at sea. She didn't allow her fear to show, she was the king's daughter, and she had to display courage.

While the others focused on sailing through the storm Merida went about making sure their supplies were secure under the oiled cloth. The last thing they needed was to lose their food and fresh water. As she was tightening up another knot when she heard a whisper, as clear as though it had been spoken in calm weather. Merida shot a glance to the top of the supplies and saw another will-o-the-wisp floating and beckoning towards her.

"What de ye want? Ye foolish devil!" She muttered fiercely. "I canna follow you over board if that's what yer thinkin'."

The wisp drifted a bit higher, Merida glanced around to see if anyone else was looking at it, but they were all focused on the task at hand. The wisp disappeared for a moment and then reappeared right in her face. She cried out in shock and fell back onto the ship floor, causing one of the men to look at her in concern, but she gestured that she was fine; however the man's mouth fell agape. Merida frowned, but realized that he was looking, not at her, but behind her.

She heard a scream come from one of the other men, she looked in the direction the crew was facing in time to see a great shadow blunder right over the ship.

Chaos broke. Fergus bellowed orders, some of the men followed, but the great shadow was turning back towards them. Through the haze of the rain she made out the figure of a giant creature, lightning coursing along its body. It screamed as the men on the ship began to hail arrows in its direction, many arrows fell short of their target due to the wind, however, some found their mark.

The creature screeched again, she heard an intake of breath and watched in horror as bright flames bloomed from its mouth. She felt the fire in the air, so hot the rain sizzled and evaporated instead of putting it out. It had set the mast aflame. She glanced at the other side of the ship, her father was looking at her, panic in his eyes, he reached out for her, but the flames stretched higher causing a fissure to open between the floorboards. The ship tore in two.

Merida screamed for her father, her hand out stretched, but waves forced them apart. She fell back towards the end of the ship, smacking her head against the railing. She heard someone call her name before darkness took her.

\* \* \*

><p>Thank you for reading so far! I've written a decent amount of the story already, but I figured I would begin posting it up. I will be releasing a new chapter every Sunday night until it is finished. I posted two chapters to begin though just to, hopefully, get some interest! I hope you have enjoyed it so far!</p>

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### 3. Chapter 3

\*\*Author's Notes:\*\*

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Thank you for the reviews! Good guesses on the dragon from last chapter. : )

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><p>Merida lay still. She was lying on a wooden floor, judging by the rocking; it was a ship. She remembered the other vessel she was on burning, her father on the other end reaching out as the ship broke apart.</p>

Light flooded her vision as she slowly opened her eyes. Her head was pounding, but not so much that she couldn't attempt to get up. A coarse woven sheet covered her, the ones they used to cover supplies and she was resting on the floor of an unbroken ship. There were strange men around her, they had long beards and wore patched clothing. She stared wide-eyed as she recognized that she was on a Viking ship.

Fear took root in her stomach. She tried not to call too much attention to herself as she searched for who was in charge of the boat, dreading that she already knew the answer. However, it wasn't the grey beard of Yngvild that caught her attention, but the tall imposing figure of Peadar. She felt relief: at least she wasn't alone.

Peadar was standing next to a shorter, plump man with straw coloured hair and a stone in place of one of his teeth. She noticed he was missing a hand and a leg. Both he and Peadar were in deep conversation, she tried to listen, but realized that they were talking in Norse; the language of Vikings; and she wasn't familiar enough with it. She could make out only the gist of their conversation; they were talking about land and her.

She was so busy trying to decipher what they were saying that she didn't see a woman come stand next to her. Merida looked up when she waved her hand in front of her. The woman had golden hair, plaited in a single braid behind her back and a leather band around her forehead. She wore a sleeveless shirt of various shades of blue and a short leather skirt with dark breeches. Merida realized that she was asking her a question, but she spoke too fast for her to decipher what the woman was saying.

Peadar turned his head in their direction and walked towards them. He said something to the blond girl, miming with his hands at his throat. He was implying that she was mute and gave her a quick glance that read: "follow along."

Merida was confused for a moment; she tried to piece everything together. They were on a Viking ship, not being held hostage, and Peadar was speaking fluent Norse. She realized at that moment that Peadar was probably trying to pass them off as Vikings. If she opened her mouth and spoke Gaelic it would give them away.

She glanced at the blond girl, who was giving her a look of pity. Merida lowered her gaze so that her hair hid her face. She inwardly cursed herself for not paying as much attention when Peadar had been trying to teach her Norse. With only the barebones she could barely understand what they were saying, it was even worse when they spoke quickly. She knew that she was going to have to play at being slow in the head as well if this was going to work.

She saw the boots; belonging to the blond woman; walk away from her. Peadar knelt down, keeping his voice low he leaned next to her ear with the pretext of adjusting his boots.

"I canna speak long. We were found driftin' on some debris. I don't know if yer father is alive or not. I told them a creature from the sky attacked us and that we were traveling towards a village near the Orkney Isles. There is a Viking settlement there, so they believed me. Yer are my sister in-law, I'm married te yer eldest sister. I told them ye could communicate through hand gestures."

He spoke quickly; Merida kept her face impassive as she took this all in. She made a subtle gesture to her head, implying daftness.

Peadar gave a quick nod as he stood up. He looked down at her and spoke slowly to in Norse. Merida made out the words "rest" and "break" or "Berk," but she wasn't sure about the last one. She nodded her head.

At the helm of the ship she saw the man and the woman looking at them as this transgression passed. She expected mistrust, but both carried sympathetic expressions on their face. She wondered if the fates had been kind enough to place them in the hands of nice Vikings. She snorted at the thought, and then quickly turned her head so they couldn't see her expression. She realized that she was going to have to be careful about how she acted from now on.

She rested her back against the mast and wrapped herself in the sheet. She didn't know where they were headed, but she knew it wasn't towards home. She hoped her mother would be okay, that Elinor wouldn't hear the bad news about her father and her being attacked at sea and possible dead. Thinking of her father Merida pulled the cloth over her head and tried very hard to keep her sadness buried.

\* \* \*

><p>In a short while the crew of the ship began to call out, there was an answer from a distance. Merida stood up and saw they were approaching a dock. A great hillside village took shape before her, rows of wooden houses wound their way up, with a slightly larger house resting at the top. Each house had elaborate wooden carvings of beasts and sported muted hues, giving a certain character to each dwelling.</p>

The ship rocked as it lined up with the dock. Merida took a careful step over the rail and onto the wooden deck; turning she searched for Peadar; who jumped off the ship and gave his breeches a brief pat down before giving her a smile of reassurance.

A shadow passed suddenly, Merida looked up and saw a large beast descending from the skies. She made to let out a yell, but stopped when she remember where she was. Peadar jumped in front of her and readied himself for battle, but the blond man called out to him; said something about "friend" and Peadar relaxed slightly.

They both stared in wonder as a large blue creature landed in front of the blond woman from the ship. It had a large head and its arms sported two great wings. Along its tail were needles that expanded and retracted slightly as it swished back and forth. The woman from the ship hugged the head of the beast with affection and Merida heard her call it "Stormfly."

Frustration built within her; Merida was getting tired of not

understanding what was going on and the issue of Vikings having such creatures as "friends" bothered her greatly. These people attacked the shores of Alba, although she had never heard mention of such creatures, it made her nervous for the coming raiding season.

Peadar was staring at the beast and began talking with the one-armed man again; he was talking too quickly for Merida to catch anything. She stood aside as the other Vikings hauled food and other goods from the ship.

Life moved on around her and for the first time since she could remember, she felt isolated. In her world things had revolved around her and her family. Her father's status, being the king, had always insured that people would notice her. But here she was nobody; just a woman who was mute, dumb and ship wrecked.

Thoughts of her father brought her out of her self-pity and grounded her to the task at hand. They had to make their way back home, wherever it was from here, and she had to find out what had happened to her father. Her mother wouldn't be able to hold the castle alone and heartbroken. Merida's brothers were too young to take over as well, which meant the mantle fell to her.

She took a deep, shaky breath and stood a bit straighter, new determination flowing and giving her strength. She met the eyes of the woman with the dragon who seemed to be studying her.

Panicking slightly Merida fell back into her role and reached out to touch the beast. She was nervous about what would happen; but she figured it was the best way to act the part; only a fool would reach for an animal it didn't know without fear.

The scales felt warm and surprisingly smooth. Stormfly didn't react giving Merida courage to step closer to it. The blond woman walked next to her and waved her hand in front of Merida's face. She guided Merida's hand to the creature's jaw, making a scratching motion. Merida scratched gently, unsure what was going to happen. She jumped when the animal let out a growl of happiness and dropped down onto the dock.

Her hand still in the air where she had been scratching the creature: she looked at the blond woman in a panic. The woman was laughing at her expression, brushing a tear from her eye. She looked up at Merida after a moment and placed a hand on her chest.

"Astrid" she said. Merida nodded, reminding herself to bite her tongue. She was tempted to try saying the woman's name out loud, to hear the sound. It was a pretty name. Astrid motioned to the creature and said "Dragon, Stormfly."

Astrid spoke to her slowly; Merida understood, at best, that she was questioning her about her knowledge of dragons. Merida shook her head to show that she had none and hoped that she had interpreted the question correctly. Astrid seemed confused for a moment, but then nodded and gestured that she could continue to pet Stormfly.

They were interrupted when the other men from the ship called out for the dragon to make room. Astrid smiled at Merida and waved as she climbed onto Stormfly. She made a sound and the dragon responded, outstretching its wings and flexing its tail. Merida ducked as the

wings began to beat, lifting both itself and Astrid into the air.

Pedar walked up to her, a hand cupped over his eyes to block out the sun as they watched the dragon fly away.

The one armed man smiled and clapped his good hand against Pedar's shoulder. He gestured for them to follow him as he began climbing the path up to the village.

The man, named Gobber, as Merida learned during their walk, led them to a lone hut near a cliff side facing the ocean. The inside was sparsely decorated; there were three simple pallets, a fire pit in the center of the room and two shuttered windows: one on the east wall and the other on the west. A large hanging sheet was in the back to provide some privacy for changing and bathing. Gobber had told Pedar that it was a guest hut for when others visited the island. He left them shortly after to settle into their temporary home.

"We have te find a way off this island Pedar" Merida whispered. She didn't want to speak too loud in case someone heard. Pedar dropped a sack, filled an assortment of clothing. Gobber had offered it to them, hoping that some of it would fit them. He had also provided some materials for adjusting the clothing if they needed to.

"Believe me lass, I know. I asked Gobber about it, I told 'im we wanted to reach our home before our loved ones began to worry. However, he told me their ships aren't powerful enough for the long voyage to the Orkney Isles. All of their larger vessels are being used for a trading expedition to their homeland, and on top o'that there is a wild dragon attack'n ships on that stretch o'the ocean. Most like it was the self-same creature that attacked us."

Merida sighed in frustration and fell, dejected, onto the mat on the right side of the hut.

"I have a bit o'good news though: there is a trader, goes by the name Johan, who is due to arrive in a months' time. Gobber told me that he makes trips to the Orkney Isles safely by going west around the other side of the islands. The journey will take us a few weeks due to the detour, but it means we can be close enough to home that we can send a messenger to yer mother." He said as he tested a shirt on.

Merida sat up and took a look into the bag of clothing. She noticed that there were no dresses in the bag. She pulled out some brown breeches and a long blue shirt. Walking behind the sheet she tried on the new clothing. The breeches were tighter than she was used to, but she found her movements less hindered by the lack of dress. The top was a bit larger on her and fell just above her knees. She took a spare belt and wrapped it around her waist so that it wasn't as loose.

Running her fingers through her hair she tried to detangle it as best she could. She tore a strip of fabric from her ruined shift and tied her wild locks back.

"How do I look?" she asked Pedar as she emerged from behind the curtain. He was just buckling a belt around his pants; they were looser than hers, but similar in colour. He was tugging at the collar

of an off white sleeveless tunic when he glanced at her he made a face.

"Ye look like a boy, maybe I should've said ye are mah wee brother-in-law instead of sister?" he said laughing as she growled at him.

"I happen to like 'em! I can move a lot easier in these, firing ma bow would be easier too" she muttered as she tested a pair of boots on.

"I'd love te see Elinor's face if ye walked in look'n like that" he commented smiling, but dropped it when he saw Merida's face fall. Thinking of her mother reminded her of her father.

Peadar walked up to her and placed an arm around her shoulders. He lifted her chin so she looked at him. Merida stared back into his brown eyes; she noticed his hair was sporting more silver than it had when they had left on their journey.

"Ye listen to this old man wee one, we'll find out what happened te yer father. We survived; there is a chance Fergus did too. Keep your chin up fer now."

Merida clenched her fist and, blinking back tears, nodded in understanding. They would find her father, but first they had to make it off this gods forsaken island.

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><p><strong>End note:</strong> You may note that I use some people or events from the television show, but this is a warning, I am not caught up on the show completely, so I am only using bits from it.

I promise we are getting to Hiccup, just gotta set things up. : )

#### 4. Chapter 4

\*\*Author's Notes:\*\*

I don't own any of the characters or Worlds, this is purely for fun and not profit.

I figured I may as well post up the Hiccup chapter. : )

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><p>Hiccup ran his fingers through his hair in frustration. After a month away from home, mostly waiting for a tardy Viking lord by the name of Yngvild, he was tired and looking forward to his own bed.</p>

He adjusted the angle of his metal prosthetic foot to keep the creature he was riding in the correct direction. The dragon rumbled with concern for its rider. Hiccup placed his hand on the warm inky black scales "It's okay Toothless, I'm just frustrated over the council meeting business."

The dragon heaved a sigh and together they drifted higher, passing through clouds until he could see the stars overhead. Hiccup pulled his fur cloak over his chest; despite wearing a thicker tunic the higher altitude still sent a chill right through him. He had grown quite a bit over the years; taller and a bit bigger, he didn't feel as scrawny as he had when he was fourteen.

"Hiccup!" Bellowed the man flying alongside them, Stoick the Vast, he was a large man with a long auburn beard and even more hair pulled back under his helmet. Hiccup twisted around to see his father adjusting his massive size on his blue dragon: Thornado.

"Yeah Dad?" He asked; reining in Toothless to match his father's speed.

Stoick paused for a moment before speaking, looking at his son with a resigned expression. "I'm glad that you are taking your responsibilities more seriously, but honestly son, you are going to have to watch your tongue when you are in Clan meetings."

Hiccup scoffed, rolling his eyes. Part of him knew that his father was right, but when it came to the stubbornness of Vikings: Hiccup had little patience.

After his Clan had learned to befriend dragons instead of fighting them, they had begun solving dragon troubles for many other villages. This meant there was less concern over dragons invading. The new peace drove some of the other Viking Clans to fall back to the old ways of raiding other lands. The various Clans had begun holding meetings during the early spring season to discuss, among other things, their movements and targets for when the summer weather returned. One particular Viking lord had started rallying the other clans to his cause: Yngvild the Slayer.

He sighed "I know dad, but I can't just stand by silently while they decide that our dragons should be used to kill others! Our village has never taken part in raiding season and I don't see why we should start now!"

"I understand that fighting and raiding aren't for you, but for many it is the Viking way and you can't change everyone with words Hiccup" he said calmly.

Hiccup glared down at the worn; woven; leather saddle. He knew that his father was right. When it came to Vikings it was action that changed minds. Thinking back four years when he first befriended Toothless it hadn't been until they had worked together to defeat the Green Death that the people of his village had changed their views on dragons.

"I just don't want the dragons to be used like that" he ended, his shoulders dropping as he spoke.

"I know son, but if we don't find a way to help the Clans in some form, we risk them showing up on our shores and trying to take our village. In that situation what you are trying to avoid now will be unavoidable." Stoick looked towards Hiccup for a moment longer before glancing down towards the growing lights of Berk.

Hiccup wanted to run off into the woods, but it was too dark out, he

didn't want to risk Toothless' safety just because he was feeling like a child. He thought about going to see Astrid, she was always willing to listen to his rants, but he wasn't sure if she would be back from her trip yet.

Over the years many changes had come to Berk. Astrid had started a dragon squad through the academy, they would ride out along the various Viking settlements aiding with troublesome dragons. Hiccup on the other hand had begun to take his role as chieftain's son more seriously and had started attending more trade meetings and treaty discussions.

Astrid and Hiccup had tried again and again to start a relationship, but after all of the changes in their lives had settled into routine, they found themselves with a strong friendship instead. Hiccup would always consider Astrid his closest friend next to Toothless.

Currently she was seeing a Viking on a nearby island. After she had helped them with a rampaging group of Monstrous Nightmares, the two of them had become close and had since started courting each other. As a result she made frequent trips to his village.

He heard his father sound the horn on his hip, announcing to the village their return, and heard the return sound come from the village below. Hiccup guided Toothless to the clearing in the square, making sure to leave room for Thornado to land next to them. As he was landing he scanned the familiar faces of the people of Berk. At least for now he was home, a place where he didn't have to worry about annoying Viking Chieftains. He was about to dismount when he noticed a woman that he had never seen before. She would have blended into the background save for the large mop of flaming red hair glowing in the surrounding fire light. He turned to his father to ask if he had noticed her, but Stoick was already ahead of him, questioning Gobber about her.

"Oh aye, she is a new one, her and her brother-in-law Peadar. We found them ship wrecked off the south west of here; they had been attacked by that dragon roaming the seas." He said glancing at Hiccup. "They've said they're from the mainland, but were heading towards one of the settlements near the Orkney Isles." Gobber finished.

Hiccup frowned "So it is still attacking ships then. Has Astrid sent out any of her riders to look into it?" He asked as he dropped off of Toothless' back. He patted the dragon's side as he looked towards Gobber for an answer.

"Astrid herself went out with me to look into it. We were just returning from questioning some fishermen from the next village over when we passed by the wreckage baring the two." Hiccup looked towards the woman again, but she was already walking away with another man, her brother he assumed, in her wake. The man next to her looked to be about his father's age.

"It is a shame, the woman is mute, and a wee bit daft I won't lie. However, they have been helping out. Peadar is a very talented fisherman and Merida was helping out in the kitchens until Olaf kicked her out. Seems she had a habit of dropping things all the time. We managed to find her a job with Helga though; Merida checks the traps now for game every day. It keeps her out of everyone's hair."

Hiccup grimaced slightly at Gobber's words. He could still recall when that was the village's attitude towards him. He wondered then if Merida was actually slow or just more like him.

Hiccup turned to face his father and Gobber. "Well, I am going to go clean up Toothless; I'll see you at the house Dad. Good night Gobber" he said as he began walking up towards his home. Toothless whined at him, licking his lips and giving him a sad look. Hiccup laughed "Yes, yes, of course I am going to feed you."

\* \* \*

><p>It wasn't until he was lying in his bed, listening to Toothless restlessly trying to find a comfortable position, that he questioned the names of the two shipwrecked people. For two Vikings from the mainland, they had very odd names. He recalled Yngvild mentioning almost catching the Bear King, the King of the four clans of Alba, and his fiery haired daughter while scouting. Hiccup stared at the wooden ceiling with a frown growing on his face.</p>

"We couldn't have the princess of Alba on Berk Toothless, that would be a terrible situation, and we both know that terrible situations never come to Berk, right?" He lifted his head and looked at the Nightfury. The dragon stared back at him silently, his green eyes as intense as the day he had first met him.

"Yeah, you're right buddy; who am I kidding; we always attract terrible situations." He commented, dropping his head back on his pillow. He would have to investigate the matter tomorrow; but for now; he just wanted a moment to relax.

\* \* \*

><p>The next morning Hiccup walked out of his house on a mission. The chill in the air didn't bite as much, reminding him that summer was on its way. He glanced towards the top of his house searching for Toothless. The creature in question was staring down at him, hindquarters hunched.</p>

"Wow, wait, Toothless-!" The dragon leapt down, sending Hiccup landing on his back. He laughed as he tried to escape his friend. The Viking pushed against the dark dragon, pulling one of the large scaled legs up so that he could roll out from under him. He jumped up and prepared to wrestle when a bit of colour caught his eye. He glanced towards the wooded area behind his house and saw the woman, Merida, watching him.

Toothless prodded him with his muzzle, confused why Hiccup wasn't paying as much attention. The dragon turned its head towards the strange woman and then back at Hiccup. The Viking was looking at him with a smile "C'mon buddy, let's go get some food." Toothless made a sound of contentment: the momentary distraction forgotten as they went back to their usual routine.

While making their way down to the dining hall Hiccup thought about how he was going to glean more information about the two new comers. The girl was apparently mute, but that would make a great cover if you didn't know the language. On the other hand she was able to communicate enough to find work to do, so maybe she really was just

mute.

Running his hand through his hair he questioned what he would do if his theory turned out to be true. If this woman was the princess would he tell his father? What would his father do? Stoick might send them packing, in hopes of avoiding any more trouble with the other Clans. However, he might decide to tell Yngvild about her instead, to draw the attention of Viking chieftain away from them.

The idea of telling his father ended right there, Hiccup knew he would never be able to allow either situation to happen. He didn't know much about the woman, but he knew that she had a family and probably friends, he couldn't condemn her to die on the sea, or worse a fate at the hands of Yngvild.

A slap on the shoulder nearly sent him flying forward. Hiccup turned to face his assailant and found himself staring back at Astrid. Her hair was undone and she was wearing a simple loose sky blue tunic and her usual dark breeches.

"Hey Astrid, you look like you just got up" he commented, gesturing to her unusually casual attire. Astrid punched him hard in the arm.

"I did, I was just getting ready when I saw your lazy butt ambling by. You didn't even come to say hello last night when you got back" she growled in mock anger, the twinkle in her eye betraying her true emotions.

"Yeah, I'm sorry. I was so exhausted when we got back I went straight to bed" he said shrugging his shoulders apologetically.

"Alright, I believe you. I do recall attending one of those sessions when they were held here, I don't blame you entirely." She was interrupted by Toothless' restless growl. Astrid smiled "Off to get food I see, Let me get my belt and I'll come with you" she said before jogging back to her house.

Moments later she returned; her hair now pulled back; giving her the usual "no nonsense" appearance he was used to. They walked towards the hall pausing to hail some of the townsfolk who were going about their morning duties. Along the way they attracted Fishlegs, Ruffnut, Tuffnut and Snotlout. It wasn't common that all of them were on the island at the same time anymore, so they took every chance they had to catch up with each other. Once in the hall Hiccup grabbed a plate of food and settled down at the nearest table with his friends.

"So how was the winter snore fest" asked Tuffnut as he picked at his ear. He was sporting a short golden beard now and his long hair was braided making him appear a bit more organized than he used too. Hiccup considered it Astrid's influence since she had become tough on wayward hair after several of her recruits had lost theirs in a training accident with a dragon. His sister, Ruffnut, looked similar to him, minus the beard.

"If only it had been a bit more boring. Yngvild the disturber is back on my dad's case about using the dragon's on this season's raids." Hiccup said taking a sip of his mulled cider; the spices chasing away the chill. "It's odd though, he showed up to the meeting two weeks late and although he pushed the matter, he wasn't as demanding about

it as he has been in the past. The other leaders were louder about it then he was" Hiccup finished; staring into his cup for answers.

Fishlegs smiled "Well that isn't so bad then! Maybe if he gives up on it the other leaders will follow!" he surmised cheerfully. Fishlegs hadn't changed that much in appearance.

"Either way, raiding season doesn't start for another two months or so. We have some time to come up with a solution" commented Ruffnut picking at her food.

Hiccup looked up at his friends, they were all staring back. He felt pride in each of them, how much they had all grown over the years. He knew that he could depend on them to be there for him no matter what. Astrid smirked and flicked a piece of potato at him playfully.

"Watch out, he has a sentimental look on his face. What kind of Viking Lord are you going to make when you are such a softy?" She joked. The others laughed and Hiccup smiled. It made him feel good to sit here as though they were still kids, everything normal, or as normal as it could be on an island with Vikings and dragons.

The train of thought brought him back to his question last night. He didn't want to bring his concerns about Merida to everyone. While he trusted them with his life, a lot of them were gossips.

He waited until they were all finished their meals and going their separate ways before dragging Astrid aside. She shot him a questioning glance which he ignored as he scanned the area to make sure they were alone.

"Gobber mentioned you were on the boat when the two Vikings were found at sea. What was your impression of them?" He asked leaning against the wall. Astrid looked confused for a moment, but a smirk quickly grew.

"Look at you, interested in the new girl is it?" She joked. Hiccup's looked at her in shock at the accusation.

"No, no! I justâ€¦ you didn't think there was anythingâ€¦ odd about them?" He continued to prod. Astrid stopped smiling when she realized he was being serious.

"We found them floating on a flat piece of wood, looked like it belonged to a ship. The man, Peadar, was awake and keeping an eye on the woman." She started, looking up as she focused on remembering. "He hailed us when we were close and we took them on board. He told us that they had gotten caught in a storm before being attacked by a winged beast, which I assumed was the dragon causing trouble in that area."

Hiccup frowned slightly at the last comment, a Viking that didn't recognize a dragon? He allowed Astrid to continue, keeping his questions for after.

"They had been making their way to the new settlement on the Orkney Isles; Peadar was to meet his wife, Merida's sister, there. Merida's father was on the ship as well, as were many others, but they were

the only ones we found." She finished looking down sadly.

Hiccup gave her shoulder a squeeze, Astrid had lost her father to the sea years ago as well, so he knew that she was probably seeing her own sadness from that time reflected in Merida.

"I don't think there is anything odd about them Hiccup. Peadar speaks like a Viking and acts like a proper one as well. Merida is a bit more of a mystery I'll admit. She keeps to herself despite my attempts at getting to know her." Astrid stepped towards him and looked at him intensely. "However, she is upset, I'm sure she just wants some time alone. I can respect that and so should you." Astrid said looking at him in challenge. Hiccup realized that she had grown protective over the two lost travelers.

He held back his questions, he knew now that if he was going to figure this out, he was going to have to do it on his own.

"I just wanted to get caught up on what was going on is all. Now tell me more about this wayward dragon, you haven't been able to find it at all?"

Astrid shook her head "Not at all. I've tried looking with Stormfly. After that Gobber and I tried searching by boat. We thought that it would appear if there wasn't another dragon present, but nothing. We keep hearing more and more about it though. We got a message sent along the trade route that Johan won't be coming this way again until the raiding season begins, trusting the safety of other Viking ships to see him through the danger."

Hiccup looked down considering all of these facts. Something was fishy about this whole situation, the two travelers and the troublesome dragon. Knowing he had his work set out for him, he said his farewells to Astrid before going to Toothless. He needed time to think and there was only one place where he could do that: the secluded pond where he had gotten to know his beloved friend years ago.

## 5. Chapter 5

\*\*Author's Notes:\*\*

I don't own any of the characters or Worlds, this is purely for fun and not profit.

\* \* \*

><p>Merida shifted on the hard pallet, the cool morning air of early spring driving her farther under the covers. A scratching at the door caused her to squeeze her eyes shut in hopes of ignoring it, but the sound persisted, and continued to get more frequent, finally motivating her to sit up and look around the room. Peadar was by the fire pit, stirring up a simple porridge for breakfast. The scratching sound happened again, making the front door tremble at the force.</p>

"Yer Terror is here to wake ya" Peadar said with a small smile, his eyes on the task in front of him. Casting the covers aside Merida shivered slightly before running behind the curtain in order to

proceed with her morning rituals.

They had been here for a little over two weeks now. Peadar had taken up work with the fishermen, both to keep busy and to try and find any news concerning her father. While there weren't any trade ships coming in soon, the fishing boats from the surrounding villages all shared news with each other. It was through that channel that they had learned the unfortunate news: Johan wouldn't be arriving until the start of summer.

She finished fastening her belt and walked out into the main space. The scratching at the door had reached a peak, sighing, Merida opened it up. A small bright green ball of scales pushed its way past her, she checked quickly out the door to make sure there was no one around before closing it. She turned to face the little dragon, which was now sitting patiently next to Peadar. The small dragon was called a 'Terrible Terror' and had taken up following Merida around.

It had begun when she had worked in the kitchens, she was in charge of disposing of the waste, and in the midden heap she had found several of the creatures. The cook, Olaf, had told her that they commonly picked at the left overs and to not mind them; but she realized after a few days there was one at the back that the others would push out of the way. After watching it struggle to get food, she decided to distract the others with some fish heads so that she could get closer to get a better look at him.

He looked rough around the edges compared to the rest, there was a scar across his snout, one of his horns had been snapped off, and his right wing didn't seem to fold neatly against his body. She had pointed him out to Olaf, gesturing her concern; however the cook had shrugged his shoulders and told her that he must have been one of the dragons they had kept for training before they had begun to befriend them. From that moment on she had taken to feeding him and guarding him from the others if they tried to steal his food. He wouldn't let her near him at first, growling and snapping if she tried to pet him, but after a while he began to follow her around the village, and even began to allow her to pick him up. It was a recent change that had him scratching at the door when he felt she was taking too long to appear in the morning.

She hadn't named him though, she was afraid of getting attached to anything or anyone here. These were her enemies, not her friends. In the summer seasons they would try and attack her people. She had to keep reminding herself of this when Astrid tried to get her to join her friends for dinner.

Merida admired Astrid, she had watched the woman working with her recruits and flying off on missions. She was a very strong and respected woman. In some ways Merida was reminded of her mother, Astrid was a bit more physical with people, but they listened when she spoke and trusted in her command. In this village the women were able to take control with little push back from the men, these Vikings seemed to respect their woman greatly. While Merida's father had always valued the power of the women folk in his Clan, there were many others that didn't follow that thought process.

A sharp bite at her ankles snapped her out of her thoughts.

"Ack! Ye bit mah leg ye wee devil! See if I feed ye today!" she

cursed quietly. While she felt a bit safer talking in the hut, she didn't want to draw too much attention. Rubbing her ankle she sat at the edge of her pallet and accepted a bowl from Peadar.

"Will ye be travel'n to the woods again today?" Peadar asked as he began eating. Merida nodded her head. "Make sure ye take care, I've been hear'n more about these dragons, and there are some ye wouldn't want to meet alone."

She took a gulp of her food and looked at him "Don't worry Peadar; their woods are not like the ones back home, isn't as easy to get lost in them. I've also started workin' on a new bow, and if that fails I have the Terror to strike fear in mah enemies" she finished with a smirk, looking down at the Terror who was chewing on a fish Peadar had offered him.

Peadar gave her a tight smile. She knew he was feeling a bit frustrated when it came to her well being. Back home he had never interfered with her upbringing, leaving that to Fergus and Elinor, instead he had helped train her and befriended her as an uncle would. Merida and her brother's loved Peadar and knew they could trust him. However, here there was no Fergus or Elinor; Merida was a princess of Alba in the middle of the enemy's village. While he could blend easily due to his many travels, Merida had a harder time.

As soon as they had settled he had jumped back into teaching her the language. He had focused on the basics, or the words she would commonly hear around here so that she could fit in easier. He was also balancing between trusting in her abilities to take care of herself and a desire to lock her away to keep her safe. She could've made a bow by now, each stroke of the blade for every time he said he now understood Elinor's attitude better.

Once she was finished with her breakfast she rinsed the bowl in a small wooden pail of water they used for putting out their fire. "I'm heading off now Peadar, I gotta check the traps before any dragons decide to check them for me!" She said with a bright smile. Peadar grabbed her wrist before she headed out.

"Take mah knife, just to be safe lass," he said handing it to her. She looked down at it; the horn hilt was delicately carved with symbols representing his travels. It was the same knife he had used to help her break free of the sinking ship, and it was his most prized possession.

"Peadar, I canna take this. It is your good luck charm! Yer never long without it!" He took her hand and placed the hilt of the knife on her palm. She looked at it for a moment and thought about him heading out to sea without it. "No, you have to keep this with you; it is what keeps you safe. I can grab a knife from the kitchen, a proper one, not just my carving one" she finished quickly when she saw him about to raise a complaint. She placed the weapon back into his hands.

He looked a bit disappointed and Merida felt bad, she knew that he was trying to do what he could for her. She touched his arm for a moment and then gave him a hug. He returned the gesture and Merida felt like she was back at home for a moment. She pulled back and gazed up at the aging man. His dark skin couldn't hide the laugh lines he had acquired over the years, and now there were new worry

marks creeping across his forehead.

Peadar had always been so confident, but she knew he was worried about what would happen if they couldn't get off this island, if her father wasn't alive anymore. She felt a stab of sadness twist her heart at the thought of her father, but she put on a brave face and smiled at Peadar.

"We're a great team Peadar, we will make it through this" she said stepping back and picking up her pack.

"I'm sure we will Merida, yer a strong lass and clever enough to keep yer head about ye. Although from the stories I've heard from before, that wasn't always the case" he said, flashing a bright smile.

They said their goodbyes; Merida knew he would be leaving the hut soon after her. He was heading closer to a sister village with the other fishermen. A couple of ships belonging to that village had come in from near the Orkney Isles, and Peadar was hoping to hear some news concerning her father's fate, or possible passage back home.

She walked quickly to the kitchens, grabbing the game bag and waving a greeting to Olaf. She paused by the nearly full scraps bucket and gestured a question to the cook. He blanched slightly and shook his head, declining her help. Merida bit back a chuckle as she packed her carving knife and, when no one was looking, a larger knife from the table. Olaf was always in a rush to get her out of the kitchen after her brief period of employment here didn't work out, which was mostly due to her purposely dropping things like fish guts on the floor. The dead fish smell had taken nearly a week to get rid of. She had done it because she wanted to get away from the watchful cook and have a chance to freely walk around the village. Bundling her supplies she shoved them in her bag and made her way towards the edge of the forest.

Before she walked into the woods she heard a growl and a thud come from the house near the forest edge. She looked around the front and saw the man from the other night getting up from under his dragon; Hiccup was his name, the chieftain's son. He was narrow for a Viking, but there was a confidence in his stance that made up for his smaller frame. He suddenly turned his attention to her, causing Merida to jump, she felt her cheeks grow red at being caught staring. She was saved from having to acknowledge him when his black dragon began nudging him for attention.

She quickly rushed into the forest while he was distracted. After walking for a bit she turned back briefly to make sure he wasn't following her before sighing with relief. She was looking forward to her time alone.

She heard a rustling in the bushes, glancing down she saw Terror appear. She smirked at her companion, always showing up when it came to a chance of food.

"C'mon then ye Terror, I want to finish up mah bow today" she whispered before trekking farther into the forest.

\* \* \*

><p>She spent the first part of the day checking the traps. There hadn't been anything caught yet. After making sure they were still set properly she made her way to her secret spot.</p>

She had stumbled upon this location when she had first explored the woods, there was a sharp drop leading into a round vale with a large pond in it. She had managed to find an easy climb down the rocky wall that surrounded the enclosure and had taken to relaxing there when she had time. She would swim in the pond, cook fish she would catch and started working on her new bow here. Because it was so far from the village and the path that led to the traps she felt safe enough to even allow a tune or two while she was working.

Once she reached the location she grabbed hold of the rope she had tied to a tree at the top, to make climbing down and up the rock face easier, and propelled Terror and herself down. She whistled as she pulled her nearly completed bow from a hollow in the large tree and settled herself on a rock near the water.

As she worked on her weapon she thought of home, it was here that she allowed herself to think of her family and to be sad. She brushed some of the wood shavings from her tunic and began singing the song her mother had sung to her when she was little. She was so caught up in her work that she didn't hear the flap of wings overhead, but she saw the sudden shadow appear near her. She stopped singing immediately and looked up; it was the black dragon, which belonged to the son of the lord of Berk, descending. She knew that she didn't have that much time; she dashed towards the rock face and quickly hid herself in a small gap between two large stones. She had pushed Terror ahead of her and the small dragon was grumbling at her, but thankfully kept quiet when he sensed her worry.

She watched Hiccup from her hiding place; he had gotten off of his dragon and was standing over the area where she had been working on her bow. She cursed her stupidity silently as she saw him kick around some of the shavings. He glanced around, searching, while Merida mentally tried to mold herself into the rock.

After a few more minutes of looking around he hopped back onto his dragon and took off again.

Merida waited a few minutes, looking to the sky to make sure he wasn't hovering nearby, before stumbling out of her hiding place. She dashed towards the rope and, pausing only to assist Terror onto her shoulders, began climbing. She realized that he would probably be going to go back to the village. After she was over the rock face she took off running for the path back, wishing that Angus were with her; they could have given the dragon a good race.

She realized quickly that she wouldn't be able to beat him, so she settled to covering her tracks by collecting game, as she was supposed to be. Making sure to check herself for any wood shavings that might have clung to her, she made her way immediately to the kitchens. As she stepped in she found Hiccup talking with Olaf. He was questioning him about Merida's whereabouts. She couldn't catch the whole conversation, they were talking too fast, but she could figure out that Olaf was defending her.

Hiccup glanced at her; she turned her head quickly towards the back table where game was prepared. Rolling up her sleeves and began

skinning the hare in her hands. She forced herself not to look up again until she heard him say farewell.

After he left; she finished skinning the animals caught; and hung them up for Olaf. Rinsing her hands she got ready to leave when the cook stopped her.

"Merida, you take meal to Gobber, at smithy" he said slowly, gesturing to the food on the table. Merida nodded and picked up the platter.

She had overheard that Gobber was working overtime on new weapons; it appeared the Vikings of Berk were preparing for the raiding season. She tried not to think of her people as she smiled and nodded to the other villagers as she passed them. She had grown to respect the Vikings of Berk, but she reminded herself once again that in the end they were her enemies, they were preparing themselves to raid the shores of her homeland.

She entered the blacksmith building, Gobber was mumbling to himself when she walked in. He hailed her and pointed his missing hand, now a hammer, at a rough table next to him. She placed the food down and turned to walk away when a rustling of paper caught her attention. She looked to the left and saw a door slightly ajar; she had never noticed it there before.

Glancing at Gobber to make sure he was busy, she allowed curiosity to get the better of her. There was a single candle lit that gave the small room some light. Pieces of parchment covered the walls, drawings of dragons, detailing their anatomy, eating habits and blue prints of Hiccup's dragon's tail extension.

She jumped when she heard the door close behind her. Turning she saw Hiccup standing by the doorway, studying her. Merida felt her nerves catch fire. She glanced around for something to use as a weapon, but there were only writing materials.

Hiccup blinked and then wide-eyed he raised his hands up. He spoke quickly, but Merida still could only make out that he was claiming no harm: that he had come here to work. She gave him a blank stare. Hiccup stopped talking and frowned slightly, crossing his arms. He said something quickly again, but Merida couldn't catch what he was saying that time.

"This is my work station," he said quietly in Gaelic. Merida's eyes widened in surprise; she realized, too late, that she shouldn't have reacted.

"You understand me now, don't you?" He asked, he seeming unsurprised. Merida stood still, unsure of how to react. So she fell back to playing dumb. She picked up one of his pencils and began doodling on the edge of a page.

Hiccup sighed and walked up to her. "You don't do a very good job at playing a fool" he commented as he placed a hand over hers, halting her from ruining his documents further.

It was the first time she had been this close to him. He towered nearly a head above her, his long dark hair reached just to his shoulders where it turned upwards slightly, there was a wisp of a

dark beard beginning grow along his jaw and a healthy dusting of freckles that framed his green eyes. His gaze was steady and unwavering: as though challenging her.

Merida kept her eyes on him as well: tension filling the space between them.

The door slammed open causing both of them to jump in surprise. A dark haired Viking ambled in, oblivious to the tense scene that had been playing out. Merida took the chance to quickly bob her head to both men before slipping out of the room.

She waited until the door to the smithy had closed behind her before taking off in a run, her face aflame with shock, embarrassment and something more. She didn't stop until she got to the hut where she was staying with Peadar. Pulling the door open she looked around to see if there was anyone visiting, but it was just Peadar stoking the fire in the center of the hut. He stood up when he saw her expression, going to her and glancing outside before closing the door.

"What's wrong lass? Ye look as though ye've seen a ghost."

Merida took a deep breath to settle her nerves and then went about making sure all the shutters to the windows were closed as tightly as they could be. She motioned him towards a corner farther from any openings to the outside world.

"It's that man, the Viking Lord's son; he has figured out that I'm not a Viking!" She whispered anxiously. They were so close to going home; the last thing she wanted was to lose it because of her stupidity in the woods. She told Peadar what had happened today, his face impassive as he took it all in.

"Ye didn't respond to him when he spoke Gaelic, he doesn't have any sure fire proof of your deception" he reassured her. Merida accepted his hand as he guided her to a stool by the fire. He handed her a cup of mulled wine, which she sipped, calming herself down. He was right; she had done enough to at least keep him from confirming his suspicions.

"He didn't force you to respond?" he asked a few moments later. Merida shook her head, Peadar frowned "Interesting" he finished.

After a few moments Merida felt herself relax. Peadar was watching her, a smile playing on his lips. She felt confused by his reaction; she didn't think he would be so amused by the chance of them getting caught.

"What do ye think is so funny old man?" She whispered. Peadar broke into a laugh and clapped a hand on her shoulder.

"I have some great news lass! I was gonna tell you as soon as you came in, but I thought it best to let you settle your nerves." This got Merida's attention; she cocked her head to the side in question. "It's yer father, he is alive and lookin' for ye!"

\* \* \*

><p>I hope you are enjoying it so far! : )<p>

## 6. Chapter 6

\*\*Author's Note:\*\*

I do not own the characters or the Worlds, I am not profiting off of this story.

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><p>Hiccup woke up just as the sun was beginning to crest over the water. He fed Toothless and told his friend that today he would be traveling without him. Toothless looked disappointed, but after being bribed with his favourite foods, he became more forgiving. Hiccup then strolled out of his house in order to make his way towards the kitchens: he had to make sure he got there before Merida came to collect her supplies.<p>

"Hiccup!" He stopped in his tracks and turned to see his father walking towards him. He frowned as he observed dark circles under his father's eyes, and Stoick seemed a bit hunched, as though a great weight had landed on his shoulders.

"What's wrong dad?"

Stoick stopped and opened his mouth, an attempt at words seemed to get caught in his throat. He closed his mouth and looked down at a piece of paper in his hand, frowning in concern. Hiccup felt himself go cold, he didn't know what was wrong, but he knew it wasn't a small thing, he couldn't remember the last time he had seen his father look so hesitant.

"You know, I can't remember what I was going to sayâ€|" Hiccup rolled his eyes at the biggest lie he had ever heard. Stoick looked back up at him, plastering on a fake smile. "Where are you off to?"

Hiccup wanted to push him for more information, but there was a part of him that was scared of what it might be. "I'm going to the kitchensâ€| I was going to ask Olaf if he needed him with collection today."

Stoick gave him a flabbergasted look, as though he had just witnessed Hiccup turn into a talking fish. "Err, you're going to help with collecting game? That isâ€| good, justâ€|different." Stoick stroked his beard, a sight that usually meant he was trying to work out a puzzle. Hiccup felt a twinge of fear, perhaps he was making it too obvious that he was going to try and spend time with Merida. If she really was from Alba, he wanted to help her get back home, not be used as a pawn. That meant that he had to find out the truth before anyone else in the village.

After a moment a gleam of life flashed in Stoick's eyes, he gave Hiccup a cocky smirk. "So, going to help with collection right?"

Hiccup felt warning bells ringing in his head, but he nodded, "Yes, that is correct."

"Going to help the new girlâ€|what was her nameâ€| Merida?"

"Wellâ€| I believe she is helping Olaf in that capacity, so yes."

Stoick threw his head back and laughed, clapping Hiccup on the shoulders, "it is about time you started showing some interest in another girl, I thought you were heartbroken all this time since Astrid found someone else!" Hiccup felt his face burn as he realized what his father was assuming.

"Ahh, umm, no, thatâ€| That isn't it at all!" Stoick frowned at him.

"Well, if that isn't it, then why are you helping?"

"Becauseâ€| I should! I should know every job out there so that I can become a better chieftainâ€| Isn't that what you want?" He tried to sound confident. A cloud passed over Stoick's features; he looked down at his hand, still holding the crumpled paper.

"Aye, I doâ€|"

The two of them stood near each other in silence, awkwardness began to grow about their feet. Hiccup cleared his throat, "Umm, yep, soâ€| Are you sure you didn't need to talk to me about something?"

Stoick looked as though he was about to say something, but he shook his head and gave him a light squeeze on the shoulder. "No, no, it can wait for a bit. Go help Olaf and Merida."

Hiccup watched his father make his way back into their house. Part of him wanted to follow, to push him for more information, but he glanced towards the sun and saw that he was running out of time. He needed to solve this Merida problem, that way he would be able to help his father without being distracted. Turning around he began heading towards the kitchens again.

He looked around the village as he walked, squinting at the hut that the two stray "Vikings" were staying in search of any sign of Merida, but he didn't see her. When he reached the dining hall he turned towards the side and pushed open the heavy oak door that led into the cooking area. The kitchen looked cleaner than it had when he had been here the other night. The worn stone floor was swept; and the abused thick wood table in the middle was cleaned and clear of any food. He glanced in the direction of the small counter where game was cleaned, somehow expecting Merida to be there, but the knives were hanging on the wall and there was no sign of any mess from the work that had been done yesterday. He looked towards the fire pit to see Olaf pulling his apron off a hook; he seemed to have arrived just after the head cook.

"Hiccup, what can I do for you lad?" The larger man asked. He was tying his apron around his massive waist, how he saw past his long, bushy grey beard would forever remain a mystery to Hiccup.

"Hello Olaf, I happen to have some free time today and I was wondering if I could help with collection?"

Olaf squinted at him, obviously suspicious. "I can't remember the last time you came here looking for something to do!" he stared at Hiccup for a moment and then blinked, a large smile growing. "Oh I get it! You're interested in Merida ain't ya? I was wondering why you came by yesterday asking about her, but I figured it was just curiosity about the new comer. This makes a lot more sense though!"

"What? No! Why does everyone always assume that?" He exclaimed running a hand through his hair. He paused, despite the fact that he didn't want to lie; going along with the accusation would stop people from questioning his reasons for wanting to hang around her. He didn't want people to think he was suspicious of her.

"Don't lie to me boy, I've lived a long time, long enough to see your father pull this same stunt when he was interested in your mother" he said slapping Hiccup on the shoulder. Hiccup grinned awkwardly in response.

"Okay, you caught me" he sighed, dropping his shoulders and raising his hands in surrender.

"Good on you Hiccup! Merida seems like a fine lass, however I wouldn't trust her in a kitchen if I were you. Otherwise she is strong and despite the claim that she is slow in the head, I would disagree: she is smarter than she acts." This comment caught Hiccup's attention.

"What do you mean?" He asked casually. Olaf glanced around, checking to see if anyone was around.

"Well, during her brief stay in the kitchens I got a chance to get to know her. She does tend to act stupid when she is around a larger group of people, but when it was just the two of us she had a tendency to let her guard down. She is quite expressive and easy to read honestly. I don't know why she wants people to think she is slow, but she hasn't done anything suspicious around the village, so I guess she finds it easier to have people leave her alone that way." Hiccup cocked his head slightly.

"Why do you think she would want people to leave her alone?" He asked as innocently as possible.

"Being mute must be hard for her Hiccup! Keeping up a conversation is probably tiring, even if her gestures are simple enough to understand. " Olaf picked up a carving knife and began sharpening it as he continued to talk. "It'll be good to have someone try and befriend her at least, all I ask is that you don't rush anything boy."

Hiccup looked away at this comment, blushing. "No sir, I wouldn't. I just want to get to know her. Yesterday I-"

He was cut short when the very woman they were talking about walked in. She was smiling, but stopped short, her joy dropping, as she stared at the two of them. He read shock on her and some worry.

"Merida! Hiccup will help you today" Olaf said slowly. Merida's eyes opened a bit wider, but she seemed to recover and nodded briskly

before going to gather her supplies.

"Olaf, thank you again" Hiccup said quickly. Olaf nodded and handed him some hard bread and cheese wrapped in a cloth. Hiccup placed the items in his own pack and made his way to the door when he saw that Merida was ready.

She moved quickly out the door and on her way towards the woods behind the village. Hiccup picked up his pace in order to keep up with her. He considered how he could get her to slip up. Yesterday he had been making his way to his small pond with Toothless when he had heard singing drifting up from that very spot. He realized the words were Gaelic in origin, but just as he was trying to angle Toothless to look at who was singing it had stopped. He thought he had seen Merida's curly locks, but with Toothless landing his vision had been blocked by his friend's wings.

He knew someone had been there, on the stone he used as a seat he had found wood shavings, but when he looked around he hadn't found much else. He knew there was only one change at Berk that could have explained the situation and he had rushed back to confirm his thoughts.

He had gone straight to the kitchens when he got back, but Olaf said that she usually didn't get back until late. Just as they had been talking she had shown up. Although he had looked to see if there was anything amiss about her appearance, he hadn't noticed anything. It wasn't until the confrontation in his workroom that he had begun to confirm his suspicions. Although he hadn't meant to scare her, he had taken advantage of the fact they were alone to see what would happen if he spoke to her in Gaelic. He had seen a reaction, he swore he had, but he knew it wasn't enough. He needed her to respond and starting today, he was going to try and make that happen.

\* \* \*

><p>"Do you enjoy the woods? You seem to blend in easily, despite your hair colour that is." He said. Merida jumped slightly and turned to look at him, forcing a smile and a tight nod before returning her gaze forward. Hiccup pursed his lips in disappointment. He had thought about how to get her to talk; there was force; but Hiccup scoffed at that: he wasn't someone that enjoyed the thought of torture. Instead he decided to try and get her to trust him. So, he started trying to talk to her; in Nordic though; not wanting her to be too suspicious of him, but so far she had spent most of their time together ignoring him completely.</p>

"Sorry about speaking Gaelic yesterday, your appearance just reminded me of some folks I met in a settlement near Alba. I learned how to speak Gaelic from this family. I had been tracking a pack of Nadders that were causing trouble there and ended up making some friends. A man, Machar was his name, took the time to teach me. He already knew our language, since his village was near a Viking settlement, so it made things a bit easier." He finished, however she continued to ignore him.

He sighed, but decided to finish his story about learning Gaelic. He stopped talking when she paused to glance towards a bush. He looked at it, but didn't see anything amiss.

"What are you looking at?" he asked. She seemed about to gesture, but simply shook her head and motioned for them to continue.

Boredom crept up on Hiccup. He had never actually helped with collection or hunting before. There wasn't a lot of Vikings that did the job, since most of their food came from the sea or from their herds. However, Olaf liked treating others every once in a while with rabbit stew or roasted venison. Helga usually took care of this, but it seemed she had welcomed the chance to take her boat out and leave the task to the new comer.

He watched Merida as she moved through the woods; she seemed to fit in easily here. She was silent when she moved, but alert to the world around her, he wondered how she had been trained to hunt. Did she teach herself? Or had her father taught her? He started thinking up a dozen questions, and then whittled them down to the ones he thought were the most important.

The thought of getting her to trust him brought him back to reality. While he was confident enough to think that he could do it, he knew there wasn't much of a chance of that happening while she ignored him. He needed to move this forward without pushing her to reveal more about herself, after a moment he decided to tell her all about himself instead.

"Did anyone in the village tell you how we befriended dragons?" He waited to see if it would get a reaction out of her. She did pause, turning to look at him. There was a spark of curiosity in her expression, she shook her head and continued to look at him with an attempt at hiding her eagerness. "Great! Because I can tell you the actual version, some of my friends have a habit of, how should I put this, embellishing the tale."

She granted him a quick smile at this comment, and Hiccup felt his heart skip a beat. She cocked her head to the side, her hair flowing with the movement. The sun streamed between the trees causing her locks to glow like a bright fire, her sky blue eyes, full of emotion, contrasted her hair, making her seem almost otherworldly.

Hiccup blinked and smiled awkwardly. "Well! I will tell you the story while we walk!" he said stiffly. He motioned for her to move forward, she gave him a wary look but then turned and continued walking.

He shook his head to clear his thoughts and began to tell his tale.

The sun was just beginning to descend when they returned to the village. Merida gestured to her pack and showed him that she would finish up the job of cleaning the animals. Hiccup thought about protesting, but he realized he would probably hinder more than help in that area. He at least insisted in walking to the kitchen to drop off his own bag. Her shoulders slumped slightly, but she didn't respond except to begin walking quickly towards the kitchens.

He sighed and followed, keeping his pace even to allow her room to move ahead of him. While there had been small moments in the day where she seemed interested in communicating with him, for the rest of it all he got was a cold shoulder. He pinched the bridge of his nose as he tried to consider different courses of action. While he was patient, the sooner he learned the truth about her, the sooner he

would be able to do something about it: without anyone else learning.

He greeted Olaf as he placed his pack on the hook. He glanced at Merida, but her back was to him as she worked, Olaf gave him a sympathetic smile.

"You'll be here again tomorrow right Hiccup?"

Hiccup looked at the man, he seemed to be trying to say something in his expression, but Hiccup wasn't sure what Olaf was implying. He knew that he needed to spend more time with Merida though, so he nodded.

"Yes, I will be here again tomorrow."

\* \* \*

><p>A bit of a shorter chapter. I am so grateful for the reviews! Thank you so much for reading my story and letting my know that you are enjoying it, it really helps with motivation! : D I am in the process of writing the 34 mark of the story right now (I already wrote the ending) and am struggling to make the characters work with me.

Sometimes I'm not sure whether it is Merida or Hiccup that need to let their thoughts out in a chapter so I end up writing two versions, one from Hiccup's perspective and the other from Meirda's, but the story needs to flow forward, so that is why I only post one version of the events. Originally when I wrote up to chapter 5 I continued on with Merida's p.o.v, but when I re-read the previous chapters I always felt that something was missing. This chapter was born because I realized that Hiccup had somethings to say before Merida's next chapter.

Anyways, thank you so much for reading! : D You peeps are the best!

## 7. Chapter 7

\*\*Author's Notes:\*\*

I am feeling generous, two chapters this weekend! : D

I don't own any of the characters or Worlds, this is purely for fun and not profit.

\* \* \*

><p>Merida looked to the sky and prayed for patience; behind her she heard several branches break as the Chieftain's son came crashing through the brush. She turned and gestured for him to keep quiet; he at least had the decency to mutter an apology. She faced forward and continued walking, wishing she hadn't forced Terror to stay in the village. With Hiccup around; Olaf had told them to try and hunt since it seemed the traps weren't bringing in as much game, Terror would have made hunting harder if the other creatures caught sight of him, or his sent.</p>

Merida clutched her haphazard bow. Many of the Vikings in the village didn't use one, preferring close range combat, but she had found some poorly maintained ones buried in Gobber's shop. She still hoped to find a chance to get the one she had been working on, but due to her new shadow, she knew it was too risky.

It had been a few days since the two of them had faced off in his workroom. She had tried to be careful around him, making sure they were never alone together, but the man was determined to make it happen. He had signed himself up for hunting duties, forcing them together for long periods of time. She had done a great job keeping herself distant while they worked together, but he was determined to get her to open up to him. The first day he had talked non-stop, fortunately not in Gaelic. With her continued education in Norse, and because the Viking talked slow enough, she listened to his tale of how he tamed his dragon; Toothless; and how he had come to know some Gaelic. He didn't bring up their first meeting at all, but Merida figured it was because he wanted her to relax enough so that he could catch her off guard: she wasn't going to let that happen. This Viking was not going to make her mess up, not when she was so close to leaving this horrible island and returning home.

The thought of home made her feel better. Peadar's news about her father had helped her stay focused on their goal and had evaporated her sadness in one fell swoop.

"Merida, do you think we could take a quick detour?" Hiccup asked, slightly out of breath.

Merida noticed he was rubbing his leg just above his man made foot. She felt a slight pang of guilt, she knew from her father that too much strain on the artificial limb would cause pain and she had been pushing them very hard today. She nodded and then cocked her head, waiting for him to take the lead.

He guided her to a small path on the left and made his way forward. Merida noticed his limp getting slightly worse. She frowned, she didn't feel that bad for him, he was still a Viking after all, but she didn't want to have to carry him back to the village. She tugged on his shirt and gestured for him to pause. He waited obediently, watching her as she walked off the path searching the ground for what she needed. She wondered how he would react when she offered a walking stick to him, many men she knew would act as though they were fine, defending their pride and Viking men seemed to have it in spades. While she didn't mind the act to a degree, she hoped that this one would have some common sense at least.

At last she found what she was looking for, a sturdy branch, about the right size for the tall Viking. She picked it up, dusted away the dirt that clung to it, and handed it to him. He looked down at it and then up at her. An emotion, she couldn't place passed through his features and she thought he was going to reject it, but just as she began to lower her hand he took the stick. His hands brushed against hers; and for a brief moment she felt something stir within her; but she quickly turned her head and motioned for him to continue. She could feel his eyes on her for a moment longer, but then she heard him start to walk.

She was grateful that she was behind him; shock and outrage were swimming through her body at the foreign feeling that had passed

through her. She didn't want this man to read that from her, she knew he would just take advantage of it in his quest to get her to talk.

"We're here! This is one of my favourite places on the whole island. This is where I became friends with Toothless." He guided her through a small rock tunnel and they emerged in the valley where Merida had been taking refuge until only a few days ago. She schooled her features, masking her surprise with a look of wonder. Hiccup looked at her and smiled, he took her hand to guide her down, but she withdrew it immediately. He gave her a questioning look. Merida quickly made herself touch up her hair, rebinding it, as a way of covering her action. Afterwards she gestured for him to continue, making sure to stand far enough away from him so that he couldn't reach for her again.

When they got to the bottom she looked up at the opening they had just come through, to where her rope was concealed: the distance was minimal. She had just missed stumbling onto the rock passage. She hoped that the Viking would miss the rope dangling amongst the vines nearby.

Thankfully he didn't even look in that direction, instead he hobbled over to her usual resting place; the rock by the pond; and took a seat with a sigh.

"Come and sit," he said gesturing to a space next to him. Merida walked towards him and took a seat on the ground directly across from him; Hiccup shrugged in response and opened up his pack, taking out some of the hard bread.

"Guess we're stuck with some hard bread and cheese again, Olaf needs to get more creative with these meals" he muttered. Merida rolled her eyes. For all the intelligence that he seemed to display in his workroom, he was utterly useless when it came to normal activities. She would have thought he had been trained in things like hunting and fishing since he was the chieftain's son, even more so since he volunteered to help hunt with her!

She got up and motioned with her bow that she could catch some fish. The man stared at her dumbfounded.

"You can't catch fish with a bow, you need nets, or a dragonâ€|" she was already ignoring his comments and making her way towards the water.

She waded slowly into the water, not wanting to upset the fish too much and readied her weapon. She was grateful once more for the ability to wear breeches on this island; it was far easier to keep quiet when she didn't have to worry about skirts dragging about her. She waited patiently for several minutes, keeping herself still but ready as fish began to relax once more. She saw a large one amble over to her, heading close enough to the shallows that she knew she wouldn't lose the arrow. Aiming carefully, she watched it and loosed her arrow. After the splash the rest of the fish fled, but she had gotten the one she wanted. She picked up the arrow and held up her prize for the Viking to see. He clapped, not in a mocking way, but as though he was genuinely impressed.

"Let's get a fire going then!" he said getting up. He began gathering

wood as she collected stones, placing them in a circle. After the past couple of days working together, they had acquired a bit of a routine when it came to meals. He pulled out flint and tinder from his pouch and struck them together until the fire bloomed. At least he could make a fire. She deboned the fish and readied it for cooking as he built a spit.

Once they had the fish on a rack over the fire they sat together in silence. Eventually the meal was ready; she served half of the fish to him on top of a cut of the bread, taking her own serving back to the other side of the fire.

"I'm surprised you figured out there were fish here" he commented. Merida quickly covered her knowledge by claiming to have seen them as they were coming down into the valley. He gave her a searching look as he watched her gestures, but let it go. They continued to eat in silence.

"So tell me about your family" he blurted out, as though he had been searching for something else to talk about. Merida looked down at her food for a moment, unsure if she wanted to tell him anything about her parents or her brothers.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't pry, and losing your dad must be hard on you" he said quietly, his eyes downcast.

Merida bit her lip, guilt plucking slightly at her heart, but she forced herself to look to look forlorn. She couldn't tell him that they had found her father alive. After a moment she looked up and made a gesture to ask about his mother. She had seen his father, but she had never seen his mother about or at least wasn't sure who it might be.

He gave her a sad smile "she passed away when I was young; I never really got the chance to get to know her very well. It has been just my father and I for most of my life." Merida felt bad for asking, thinking of what she had been feeling when she had thought she had lost her father. She couldn't imagine the thought of growing up without one of her parents.

"It is okay, things were a bitâ€|stressful for a while with my dad, but we are very close now" he said smiling. Merida wanted to laugh; she could have said the same thing about her relationship with her mother.

Without realizing it, the air between them had diffused slightly. The past two days had been filled with tension; Hiccup trying to talk to her and Merida out right ignoring him for the most part. This small interaction had suddenly opened them up to each other; they began talking of other things. It was a bit difficult at times, Merida's gesturing and Hiccup's tendency to talk quickly when he got really excited, but they managed.

After a while Merida gestured towards the setting sun, motioning that they should make their way back. Hiccup nodded and stood up, stretching his legs and then helping her with disassembling the fire pit.

She pulled her pack up and looked towards the Viking in order to get them moving. He was standing by the lake staring at something on the

ground. Merida moved up slowly, trying to crane her neck to see what he was looking at, but froze when she saw the wood shavings from her last time here. She waited, stock still, for him to comment on it, but instead he turned and smiled at her.

"Let's get going then," he said, walking back towards the opening. Merida watched him, relieved that he hadn't investigated it, but suspicious as well. She walked slowly behind him, waiting for a surprise confrontation, but it never came. Once they were back in the woods she felt herself let out a breath she had been holding in.

On the way back to the village they had managed to find a rabbit in one of the traps and Merida downed a deer. The creature was too large for them to carry back though, so the Viking went ahead to get Toothless.

She watched him leave as she took a seat on a fallen tree nearby. She thought she would feel more relaxed as soon as he was gone, but instead she found a touch of loneliness gnawing at her. She had avoided making friends since she had arrived on Berk and since Peadar was gone most of the time, it meant she had been alone. It wasn't until she had spent a few days with the Viking that she had really recognized it.

Shaking her head she smiled to herself; there was no point in changing her ways now; she was going home soon. The Vikings would raid the shores of Alba this summer and she was sure that some of them would be from Berk. These people seemed friendly now, but she knew if they discovered who she really was that would all change.

She picked at the log she was sitting on, trying to pass the time, but boredom soon took hold in her. She frowned, surely it had been long enough for the man to get back to the village; they were only about ten minutes away! Images of him limping earlier played in her head; a new concern began to bloom: what if he was hurt?

Merida stood up and began pacing. She glanced at the deer and then back in the direction Hiccup had gone. She first tried to tell herself that she was worrying over nothing, it hadn't been so long and that he was fine. Looking up at the sky she saw that the sun was close to setting, the deep purples and dark blues were beginning to overtake the light from the sun: in another half an hour she would be in the dark. Hiccup had assured her that he wouldn't take long, had he tried running? She decided her action with a nod to herself, doing her best to keep her worries at bay. She hoisted her pack onto her shoulders and began walking in the direction the Viking had taken.

A groan and the sound of branches breaking stopped her in her tracks. A shadow covered what little remaining light there was as Toothless landed in a small clearing next to where she had been waiting.

Merida ran up to meet him; her worries must have shown in her face, for Hiccup jumped off of Toothless and was quickly at her side: looking around at the surroundings. Merida cursed herself silently, but the relief that he was okay didn't seem to care what her rational side thought.

"Are you okay? Did something happen?" He asked, worry in his

voice.

She felt a blush rise to her cheeks; she stepped away from the man so that she could think. Shaking her head she brushed some imaginary dirt from her tunic and walked back to the deer. The Viking was scrutinizing her when she looked back at him, but after a moment he shrugged and helped her carry the deer to Toothless. After it was strapped onto the dragon, Hiccup got on, twisted to the side and offered her a hand. Merida stared at it in confusion.

"Let me help you up, I promise I don't bite" he said with a smirk. Merida gestured, questioning Toothless' wellbeing over carrying so much weight. "Oh, he is far stronger than you give him credit for, aren't ya buddy?" He finished placing a caring hand on the dragon's neck. Toothless growled in confirmation, eyeing Merida and lowering himself a bit more to convince her to get on.

She hesitated for a moment longer, but the curiosity of what it would be like to fly made her accept his hand. She positioned herself behind him and in front of the deer, and frowned when she realized she would have to hold onto him. gingerly, she clasped onto his shirt, he snorted and muttered something under his breath, but gave Toothless the go ahead.

The air rushed around her as they elevated, causing her ears to pop, she smiled brightly and looked down to watch the trees become smaller and smaller beneath them. Merida had to stop herself from cheering as the exhilaration of flying hit her: she loved it! She shook Hiccup's shoulders and tried to ask him why he ever bothered walking anywhere, he smiled at her excitement, but didn't seem to understand her question. Merida had to bite her lip to stop herself from just asking the question out loud. She watched the ground below them, the village of Berk coming closer into view. Her shoulders slumped as they started descending; Hiccup glanced back at her and laughed.

"I can take you up again another time if you want, but it is getting dark and we really should deliver your catch." Merida nodded in understanding, trying to school her features again as they landed near the kitchens. Olaf hailed them and walked up with another Viking whom Merida didn't recognize. The two men lifted the deer off of Toothless while Hiccup motioned for Merida. She followed him into a cool room.

"Here, take one of these fish." She looked at him in confusion, "for Toothless. I like to give him a gift when he helps out." Merida smiled, thinking of Angus and the apples she would sneak for him. They walked back out and she hesitated for a moment before offering the fish to the dragon. The creature's eyes twinkled and Merida jumped in surprise when his teeth appeared and he snapped up the fish suddenly. Hiccup smiled and gently punched Toothless on the shoulder, reprimanding him. Merida felt herself let out a breath she had been holding in.

"Merida!" She perked up when she heard Peadar, glancing around she finally spotted him coming up the hill with the others in his fishing group. He dropped off his cargo at the kitchen door before coming up to meet her, taking in the scene around them. "Is everything okay? Your hair is looking quite wild right now" he smiled as he placed a hand on her shoulder. Merida gave him a small smile and nodded.

"We managed to bag a deer, so I took her up on Toothless. I figured it would be the quickest way back to the village," Hiccup stated, his body seeming rigid. Merida gave him a confused look, not sure why he was behaving that way. Peadar, on the other hand, laughed aloud and patted the Viking on the back.

"It's okay boy, I wasn't concerned that she was hurt. It has just been a while since I've seen her so excited" he finished looking back at Merida. The girl frowned slightly and looked at the ground. She had let herself relax, she had forgotten for a moment that she wasn't supposed to trust this Viking, he was just trying to get her to slip up again.

"Oh, that is good. Actually, uh, I wanted to invite her to dinner with my friends. I know that you both usually eat on your own though, but I thought maybeâ€¦Merida? Would you be interested?" he asked, looking at her.

Merida was about to shake her head, but Peadar's hand squeezed her shoulder. She glanced at him and saw his slight nod for her to say yes. She wasn't sure why he wanted her to eat with them, but she nodded yes to the Viking. Hiccup gave her a genuine smile and said he would see her at the dining hall in an hour, then he hopped back onto Toothless and they flew off in the direction of his house. She watched them go, feeling a slight pang of jealousy.

"C'mon then lass, let's get ourselves ready for dinner."

\* \* \*

><p>Once they were back in their hut Merida turned on Peadar.</p>

"Why did ye make me say yes?" Merida whispered fiercely to Peadar. The older man chuckled at her anger.

"Ye need to learn to accept people for who they are, not judge them because of where they came from girl. I've traveled to many places, met many different sorts o'people, but no single clan, family or race is truly evil."

"But they raid our shores! Mah people have suffered at their hands the past summer! We have to pretend to be one o'them just to be safe!" She tugged at her hair in frustration, baffled that the usually sensible Peadar was spouting this nonsense.

"Aye, there are Vikings that do just that, but ye have to ask yerself: do these ones?"

Merida stared at the ground, struggling with the doubts that had been forming within her prior to this. The Viking that had been hounding her hadn't really been causing her that much trouble. He could have persisted in getting her to fess up, or; being the Chieftain's son; taken her captive and forced her to talk. Instead the man, Hiccup, had been patient and kind to her.

"But how do I really know that? The one Viking has been okay-" she forced out. "But I don't know the rest o'them." She ended looking at him with a frown. While there was some doubt, there was no proof that they weren't raiding either.

"And that, m'lady, is why we will be taking some time to get to know them better" he smiled, patting her on the head.

\* \* \*

><p>I hope you enjoyed the chapter! :D More interaction finally.</p>

## 8. Chapter 8

\*\*Author's Notes:\*\*

\*\*A shout out to some of those who have been leaving reviews! Thank you so much everyone, it means so much to me!\*\*

\*\*amore1993 -\*\* Thank you so much! Your review really picked me up when I was feeling a bit low. :D

\*\*Dov5e\*\* - Thank you! :D Hur, hur I hear you on that. I wanted to take time with their relationship though, so it won't be happening immediately.

\*\*Jonza\*\* - Ah yes, Stoick's worries will become more apparent in the near future, but for now we are back to Merida's perspective. Thank you for the review! :D

\*\*Cilone\*\* - Yeah! I'm sure Hiccup will feel better when he doesn't feel like he is walking on eggshells around Merida as well. :)

\*\*Comet Moo\*\*n - XD Thank you for the review!

\*\*qotss\*\* - Thank you! I love Astrid and I didn't want to ignore her (multi-shipper here). Mericcup is my otp, but I still find Hiccup/Astrid cute, so I couldn't be mean to my tough girl! Thank you for the wonderful review! :D

\*\*Ms. O'Leary\*\* - Thank you for the review! I really appreciate the time you've taken to read my story and I am happy you are enjoying it!

\*\*ROTBTD FANGIRL\*\* - Hiccup will continue to push himself to get to the truth! Thank you for the review! :D

\*\*Music Person\*\* - Hiccup is one smart cookie, can't discredit that! Thank you very much for the review!

\*\*marshallyel\*\* - Thanks for the review! As I mentioned above: I love Astrid, so when this story came together she entered with a good part to play. : )

\*\*Nitmi\*\* - Thank you very much! :D

Now on with the show!

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\* \* \*

><p>Merida trudged her way towards the dining hall, each step a struggle as the weight of various worries settled on her shoulders. She didn't want to spend time with Vikings; she didn't want to grow attached to them. What if they were attacking Alba? Was she supposed to forgive them just because she knew them? She balled her hands into fists filled with frustration at her situation, and at Peadar, who had added to the weight of her worries.</p>

She was so caught up in her thoughts that she didn't notice Astrid calling out to her. The woman finally ran up and patted her on the shoulder, causing Merida to jump in surprise.

"Sorry Merida, I didn't mean to scare you," she said with a smirk, obviously finding Merida's reaction funny. "Are you heading to the hall to eat? Hiccup mentioned that he invited you. I'm glad that you decided to join us" she said, her smile gentle as she pushed Merida towards the door.

The two women walked into the hall. Torches illuminated the worn cobblestone floors and wooden pillars. Merida gawked at the carvings and tapestries, even though she had been here for several weeks, she had always avoided eating with everyone else. The hall was grand and reminded her, in a way, of home. The thought of her father's hall gave her a piercing of homesickness. She imagined the family table set up for dinner, her younger brother's causing trouble and calling her names to try and get a reaction from her. Merida saw her mother, still nit picking the small things, but relaxing when Merida and Fergus joked about it.

"Merida?"

She blinked back tears and looked up into the concerned expression on Hiccup's face. She hadn't noticed him walk up to them, her imagination taking her far away from Berk. She felt embarrassed at being caught off guard twice so far. Swallowing her homesickness she gave him a weak smile before motioning him to show her where to sit.

He placed her between himself and Astrid, perhaps taking into consideration that she wasn't familiar with the others in their group of friends. A large Viking with dark hair placed some food in front of her with a smile. He wore a horned helmet and sported a dark beard on his round face. After a moment Merida realized it was the same Viking that had, inadvertently, rescued her in Hiccup's workshop.

"It is wonderful to have another lovely woman join us for dinner!" he said, receiving a punch in the arm from a long blond haired woman next to him, she wore a dark blue tunic and had plaited her hair in three ropes. Beside her was, Merida assumed, her brother due to the similarity between them, however, he had grown a goatee and wore his long hair in a single plait. The last man was the largest of the group, he was round, but in a muscular way; reminding her of Macguffin's son; he was already talking about dragon migration paths, although it was hard to keep up with what he was saying sometimes.

"Now everyone, let's play nice and not scare Merida away." Hiccup

said standing up. He gave her a smile and then began to motion to his friends, "Merida, I want you to meet Snotlout, Tuffnut, Ruffnut and Fishlegs. You already know Astrid." He sat back down after, while the group gave her polite hellos. She gave them a small smile and nodded in return.

"So, Merida, how are you finding it on Berk? I'm sorry I haven't gotten a chance to get to know you better, been out with my troops you see" said Snotlout, flexing his arms back to show muscle. Merida raised an eyebrow and tried to stop herself from laughing. She saw Astrid roll her eyes.

To be polite though she gestured that she was finding it okay, but that she missed her home. It was the truth at least.

"What was the name of your village?" questioned the Tuffnut, "I've been flying with my sister on a couple of missions in the area Peadar mentioned, maybe I can get word to your family back home?"

She felt her insides freeze in panic; all eyes were on her waiting for a response. She wondered then if this had been Hiccup's plan all along. She glanced at the Chieftain's son; he was giving her that searching look once more. She swallowed, she hadn't even asked what area Peadar had said they were from: she only knew that she was going to the Orkney Isles! She felt her face grow warm, her hands tugging gently at a lock of her hair.

"Geeze Tuffnut, ask the girl an even harder question to answer why don't you?" scoffed Hiccup sarcastically. Merida froze in shock at his rebuttal of his friend's question.

"What are you talking about Hiccup? It is a completely sensible question!" He growled back.

"For someone that can talk sure, but I would love to see you try and say Berk without being able to talk"

The blond man, Tuffnut, dropped his shoulders in defeat. He gave Merida a sheepish look.

"Sorry, I forgot that you couldn't talk." She gave him a dazed smile to show that it was okay.

The group was silent for a moment before the large man, Fishlegs, began talking about migration patterns again.

Merida was lost in a sea of confusion when it came to the man sitting next to her, first he tried to confront her about who she was in his workshop and then completely drops it. Next he followed her around for days, but never pushed her to open up to him at all. She wanted to grab him by the collar and yell curses at him for the trouble he was causing her! She wasn't sure anymore if he was just extremely patient, or if she had actually convinced him that she was just a normal Viking.

She spent the rest of the meal trying to make herself as invisible as possible, eventually relaxing enough to just listen to their conversations. She found, as the evening progressed, that it was easier to keep up with what they were saying. She smiled at their jokes and felt drawn in by their adventures with their dragons. She

was happy that she had taken her Norse language lessons with Peadar more seriously once they had found themselves trapped here.

A small body wriggle between her legs, causing her to sit up in surprise. Astrid gave her a questioning look.

"Are you okay Merida?"

Merida nodded, lips pursed, as she leaned back and looked under the table. Amongst the Viking feet was Terror, licking his chops.

"Well what do we have here?" She heard Hiccup before she saw his arms reach down to grab Terror, she tugged at his arm, trying to warn him that Terror didn't like to be handled by people he didn't know, but the man ignored her.

Much to her surprise Terror willing crawled into Hiccup's lap and peered at her. She frowned, feeling betrayed by the small dragon.

"It is rare to see this guy in the mess hall, he usually avoids people" Hiccup commented, giving Merida a sly look. She tightened her lips, turning her attention back to her plate. Terror butted his head against her arm, but she purposely ignored him: she had thought that he only trusted her! She watched Hiccup feed him scraps off his plate out of the corner of her eye. Terror was obediently accepting them without biting him.

Astrid placed a hand on her shoulder, "don't mind that. I've seen this guy following you around, but you have to understand; Hiccup has a way with dragons; this one has good reason to trust him too. He nursed him when we first freed them from where we had kept them captive, so he trusts Hiccup."

Merida looked at the Viking, the man wasn't paying attention to her: he was running his fingers along Terror's scales, pulling loose ones and checking him for any new injuries. After a moment he noticed her looking at him, he gave her a warm smile, causing her to blush. She turned back to her food and used her hair as a shield to hide her reaction from him. Merida thought back on the past few days, recalling how he had been behaving, she wondered then if he was treating her as though she were a dragon to be tamed. The thought had a sour taste; she didn't like the idea of being someone's experiment.

Once the meal was over she said her farewells and wandered slowly back to where she was staying. Just as she was reaching for the handle of her door she heard a screech and a growl as Terror came running to catch up with her. She looked down at him with a frown "betrayor" she muttered lowly to the small green dragon.

"I thought he was the one hanging around you"

She felt as though she had leapt three feet in the air. She turned, glaring daggers, and found Hiccup giving her a cocky smirk; as though he had caught her red handed. She marched up to him, enjoying the transformation of his humoured look melting into fear. She punched him as hard as she could in the shoulder.

"Ow, ow, okay. Jeeze, I get this a lot with girls" he muttered the

last bit to himself, rubbing the spot where she had hit him. Merida just stood there, fists at her side, all her frustration and the fear that he had heard her just now, accumulated into a blind rage. She dragged him into her hut and slammed the door behind her. Peadar hadn't returned yet, so the place was empty save for the two of them and Terror, who was scampering up onto her bed.

"Uhh, I'm sorry?" Hiccup said cautiously, unsure of what she was going to do. Merida paced, looking up at him, tensing up and then going back to pacing.

She wanted to yell at him, she wanted beat him up, her frustration at everything, all the careful steps she had taken to hide her true nature, to not become attached to anyone here, to not even learn their names, all ruined because of this man. She was so angry and sad, wishing desperately that she were home with her family, not trapped here.

It took her a while before she remembered that she had actually dragged Hiccup into her place. She stopped pacing and looked at him. For the first time since she had arrived here she threw her fear aside: she was Merida of clan DunBroch! She was the Bear King's daughter! She would not bow to the will of a Viking. She stood tall and confident, giving the Viking a furious glare that she had seen her mother use often.

The man stood his own ground, he seemed nervous at her change in character at first, but then stood straighter and met her eyes. He reached a hand out to her, but paused, inches away from her arm, and kept himself still as though he was waiting.

"I swear Merida, I am not trying to hurt you," he said quietly, his green eyes piercing through her. She felt herself relax enough to realize that she was crying. She stepped back and then turned away from him, keeping her back to him. She didn't move again until she heard the door finally creak open and then close with a thud.

\* \* \*

><p>Only one chapter this week. Work has become quite busy, so I don't want to fall behind and leave you all waiting longer than a week for the next update! I hope you are enjoying the story so far! :D<p>

## 9. Chapter 9

\*\*Author's Notes:\*\*

Posting it earlier because I feel like it. I've been really feeling the Mericcup feels, so getting ahead of the story wasn't too hard.

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\* \* \*

><p>She was awake before dawn. Sitting up she carefully and quietly slid out from under the covers and tip toed behind the curtain to get changed. Lighting a candle, she grabbed her usual attire, but paused,

and then changed her mind. Digging into the bag containing the clothes they had been wearing when they had arrived, she was surprised to discover that her dress and shift had been washed, the salt from the ocean no longer staining it. Glancing towards Peadar's sleeping form Merida smiled gently and thanked him silently.<p>

Merida took stock of the state of her dress. She had cut away most of the lower half, the embroidery was lost in the waters now. The top was intact, as were the sleeves; save for some minor tears. She rummaged through the clothing bag Gobber had given them and found a large top that was similar in colour to her dark blue dress, although a bit of a lighter shade. It wouldn't be the most amazing dress, but it would serve its purpose for the day.

She used the sewing materials they had received from their first day, thankful that there was still enough thread for what she planned to do. She cut away at the larger shirt and pinned it to the waistline of the dress. It wouldn't be as long as her original one, but with breeches she would feel comfortable enough. She wasn't doing this for fashion; she was doing this to remind herself of who she was.

An hour later she heard Peadar wake up. She finished the hem, tied off the thread and threw the dress over her head. It reached down just below her knees, the jump from the dark blue on the top to the lighter shade below was a bit harsh, but it would have to do.

"What are ye up to so early in the morning lass?" She heard Peadar ask through the curtain.

"Tryin' something different," she responded, drawing the curtain aside to show him.

Thankfully he didn't laugh. He studied her for a time, his hand stroking the stubble on his chin.

"If yer gonna to do this, ye might as well do it properly," he said calmly, going into his bag and pulling out a bundle of material. When he stretched it out: it was cloth woven with the green gray tartan of her clan.

"How did ye know what I was going to do?" she asked, Peadar gave her a warm smile.

"Oh lass, yer very much like yer father in many ways, but that determined look on yer face right now is straight from Elinor. I can think o'only one reason ye'd be pullin' out yer dress, but I have to ask: are ye sure?"

Merida stood straight and nodded. She then gave him a small smile, she hoped that she could invoke some of her mother's composure and not let her emotions get control of her again.

"I'm gonna to need something thoughâ€|" she said, giving him a bit of a pleading look.

"Oh, looks as though yer want'n to ask me a favour" he chuckled.

"I need a sword."

\* \* \*

><p>Merida tugged her cloak closer, covering her dress, the sun was peaking over the horizon now, she judged it to be the time she would usually arrive at the kitchens. Today however, she was going to skip work. She wasn't sure if Hiccup would go there or not after last night, but even if he didn't show up there, she hoped that he would go to the valley.</p>

She carefully snuck around the back of the common area, while it was early, there were many Vikings already getting ready for a days work. She didn't want them to see her or ask why she was dressed the way she was, and most importantly: why she had a sword.

Once she was free of the village and in the forest she allowed herself to relax a bit. She sighed wistfully as she heard the smallest of branches breaking and undergrowth shuffling: Terror had followed her.

"I thought I closed the door on ye back at the hut." She commented as the small green dragon walked out into the open. He ignored her and walked ahead of her, tail erect, as though he just happened to be in the same place at the same time as her.

"I bet Peadar let ye out, I don't think yer gonna offer me that much protection boyo" she said to the dragon's back. "Butâ€œ I don't mind the company."

The hike didn't take as long when she wasn't slowed down by the Viking. She made sure to follow the trail he had shown her that lead to the break in the rock wall, sliding through she made her way down to the valley floor, carrying Terror on her shoulders.

She looked around: the water was calm save for the occasional ripple of fish swimming below and birds singing to each other has they hopped around the ground searching for food. She made her way to the crevice where she had frantically hidden her bow; removing it she looked it over for damage. Thankfully there was none.

Taking a seat on the rock by the pond she removed her cloak and laid the sword beside her. Opening her pack she took out the gut string she had taken for her bow and the handful of arrows; the best ones she could find. Finally she took out Peadar's lucky dagger: he had insisted on her taking it since she would be risking more than he. She studied the ivory hilt and all of the little carvings that were on it. There were images of a small figure sailing and reaching mountains, she saw a small engraving of Clan Dun DunBroch's emblem marking the point in his journey when he arrived at their doorstep. She decided that she would make some of her own carvings, to mark her own journey.

After an hour she sighed and sat back. She had made several knots and a few rough images showing her journey to Berk, but she was beginning to feel restless. She picked up her pack, feeling a bit hungry, and rummaged through it for the provisions she had packed, but when she found them her hunger evaporated leaving only worries.

The longer she waited the more fear began to creep into her bones. Clenching her hands into fists she stood up and began gathering sticks and leaves, using the vines along the wall as rope she

fashioned a dummy. She placed it at the end of the valley and marched back to where her bow was: shooting always calmed her down.

Her eyes met the target; she pulled back and loosed the arrow. It hit the center. She pulled back and eyed the head and shot. She kept going until she was out of arrows, each time she had made sure to not to damage them: these Vikings weren't very good at making them to begin with. She walked to the dummy and collected them.

She was just returning the arrows to her borrowed quiver when she heard the rustle of movement behind her; she drew her bow lightning quick and pointed it at the noise. Hiccup stood near the entrance: frozen in place. She relaxed her arm and heard him let out a breath.

"Your amazing!" he said once he recovered. Merida stood still and watched him, her face calm. He met her look, but she saw him take in her dress and the tartan tied around her waist. He didn't say anything; he simply stood there and waited.

Merida walked confidently to the stone where the sword was. Hiccup kept his eyes on her, but remained where he was. She picked up the sword and turned to face him, she noticed the fear creeping back into his eyes.

"Um, I didn't knowâ€|that we would be sparring!" he commented, his voice sounding a bit high. He laughed nervously, "I'm not very good with swords, I mean, I worked for Gobber as a smith, but they wouldn't really let me use weapons before." He continued to ramble, his words coming out faster making it harder for her to keep up. The sight of the man, nervously trying to buy time, made her nearly drop the weapon and laugh aloud. She wondered why she had been so worried about him before.

Taking a deep breath she placed the tip of the blade into the soft earth in front of her, keeping her hand on the hilt and standing tall behind the weapon, as she had seen her father do when he was addressing his men.

"I am Merida of Clan DunBroch!" She claimed proudly in Gaelic, reminding herself of when she had stood up against her arranged marriage many years ago.

"I am the daughter of Fergus, the Bear King of Alba and I challenge ye; as the Chieftain of Berk's son; to a dual. If I win, ye'll let Peadar and I take a boat and sail away, if I lose, ye may take me captive." She finished and stood still, waiting for his answer.

The Viking looked frozen in place; his hands were near his chest and his mouth stuck open. He blinked, recovering, but didn't seem to know what to do. Merida frowned, what was wrong with this man? She had just challenged him! It was his duty to respond!

"Well? What is yer response? If ye think that; just because I'm a woman; ye can't take me seriously I will quickly change yer mind boyo" she said, lifting the blade so that it was eye level with her, tip pointing towards the man.

"N-no! That, that isn't itâ€| it justâ€|took me a moment to translate all of that, sorry" he responded in Gaelic.

Merida blinked and lowered her weapon. She had assumed that his Gaelic was good, but she realized that he probably had the same issue she did when someone talked in Nordic too quickly.

"Okay then, so what is yer response?"

Hiccup ran his fingers through his hair; he gave her a bit of a sheepish look. "Can I just skip the fighting and help you both get home? I mean: you'll probably take me down really easily, so I would rather avoid the bruising."

Merida dropped her pose, feeling deflated. She had spent all morning reeling with the possible outcomes that her challenge would present, but this one hadn't crossed her mind at all. She had come here prepared to challenge a Viking chieftain's son! Instead she was looking at the most passive man she had ever met in her life!

"Yeâ€|don't want to fight?" She asked, feeling suspicious.

"No, not particularly." He slowly walked up to her, glancing down at her sword. "Um, you aren't going to attack me, are you?"

Merida looked down at the weapon. She felt some hesitation, unsure if he wanted her to drop the weapon with the purpose of attacking her while she wasn't armed. She looked back at him. For the past few days she had seen a man that didn't force someone into an uncomfortable position, even though he had the right to, someone with patience and caring for the people and creatures in his life, and a man that was just terrible with hunting. Although there was a part of her that was afraid, she placed the sword on the ground.

He breathed a sigh of relief, his shoulders sagging as though a weight had been lifted off of them. Merida couldn't help herself, she laughed at him. He blushed and looked down, embarrassed.

"Ah, ha, ha, yes, I am not your traditional Viking." This just caused Merida to laugh harder, all of her stress melting away. For the first time in nearly a month she felt herself relax. Hiccup coughed, as she slowly stopped laughing, and then smiled, extending his hand out to her. "Well, maybe now is a good time for a proper introduction: I'm Hiccup, dragon tamer and son of Stoick the Vast."

Merida grasped his forearm firmly "I'm Merida, best archer in Alba and daughter of the Bear King Fergus. Did ye mean what ye said though: that ye'll try and get us home?" She said, hope growing within her.

"Yes, I promise you Merida, I will do everything that I can to get you back home safely."

\* \* \*

><p>Yay! Please let me know if you are enjoying the story so far! :D</p>

\*\*Author's Note:\*\*

Hey folks, sorry this chapter took so long. I lost Hiccup's voice and this chapter had to be told from his perspective. I ended up writing a series of drabbles to get my pen back to him. Things are flowing a lot better now, so hopefully back to our regular scheduling.

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\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup felt a jolt of excitement strike him as he grasped hands with Merida. He had been worried yesterday what would happen moving forward, the last thing he had expected was for her to decide to take her fate in her hands and challenge him openly. He was relieved that he could convince her of his good intentions, before she decided to kill him that is.</p>

After a moment he realized that he was still holding her hand. They both let go and an awkward silence fell over them. He cleared his throat, "Well, now that we are being a bit more honest with each other why not take this time to get to know each other better?"

She seemed a bit hesitant still, although Hiccup didn't blame her. They had spent the past week dancing around each other; and she had spent nearly a month pretending to be mute; the sudden straightforwardness would take some getting used to. They took a seat by the rock face that led out of the valley; Merida brought her bag with her and automatically searched for her rations and offered half to him. The small gesture of familiarity to their routine helped them both relax. They sat in silence for a bit as they ate, Hiccup spent the time searching for a topic to start with.

"Soâ€| You're a princess!" He said: feeling stupid the instant the statement came out of his mouth. She offered him a small smile and nodded, obviously still used to responding without talking.

After a moment she cleared her throat and spoke in Norse, "Yesâ€| I princess" he tried his best to keep his expression neutral as he watched her face grow as red as her hair. Her accent wasn't as bad as it could be, but she was obviously without practice when it came to speaking the language out loud.

Despite his best attempt at decorum a small chuckle escaped his lips: he couldn't help it. She pouted at him, which drove him to cover his mouth in an attempt to hide his smile. He took a deep breath and gave her an apologetic look, but she was now glaring at him. "I'm sorry, honestly, but for now why don't we just speak in Gaelic."

Merida stared straight ahead with a stubborn set in her jaw. "I speak what I want." She responded slowly. Hiccup raised his eyebrows feeling slightly bewildered by her persistence, but then again, she had shown many signs of her nature over the time he had spent with her.

"Well, I'll continue to speak in Gaelic." She merely nodded in response.

He sighed, remembering the brief glimmer of hope he had carried that

communication would be easier now. He looked up at the pond and watched the Terrible Terror that followed Merida around attempting to fish. It tried to wade slowly into the water so that it wouldn't scare the fish, but the fish were too deep and he ended up floundering about the moment he couldn't keep his head above the water. Hiccup felt his heart go out to the small dragon: he felt his pain.

"Now that we are talking, mind telling me how you actually ended up ship wrecked?" Merida nodded, but remained silent for a time, most likely trying to find the correct words to use.

"Iâ€| was travelingâ€| My father on aâ€|" he was patient as he listened to her recant the tale of her journey; he drew his knees up and found himself carrying a small smile at the little frown line that appeared between her eyebrows. But the smile fell when she mentioned Yngvild, although he had known that the Viking lord had assailed the King of Alba, it made him angry at the man when he listened to what had happened from Merida's perspective.

She moved along from his part in her tale and onto how they had gotten shipwrecked, she started describing the dragon. Hiccup perked up at the mention of it, although some of the sailors that had been attacked had claimed it to be a dragon, none of them had gotten a clear look at it.

"There wasâ€| anâ€| energy? Lightning! There was lightning around it."

"A Skrill!" He whooped, startling Merida. "Sorry, it's just that I've been trying to figure out more about the dragon in that stretch of the ocean for a while now."

"Has it beenâ€| causingâ€| trouble long?"

He sighed as he leaned back against the rock, "it has been almost two months since we started hearing reports of a dragon between Berk and Alba. It was unfortunate for Berk and the surrounding villages as we were going to begin treaty talks with the Orkney Isles, it seems that Alba beat us to that because of the delay."

Merida frowned "Wait, ye were going to be treating with Orkney as well?" She had switched to Gaelic, obviously finding this topic too important to use for Norse practice.

"Yes, Berk, as you may have seen, doesn't have much in the ways of natural resources. We either depend on the mainland or we find others we can trade with. When our ships left to make the journey they were waylaid by a vicious storm, after that we began to hear the rumors of other ships being attacked."

She stared at the lake for a while, fiddling with a lock of her hair. Hiccup thought about that unfortunate event. It had been dragon-nesting season, so he had left with them on their migration. By the time he had returned to investigate the issue the window of opportunity with Orkney had passed, leaving Berk to depend on trade with the mainland.

"I have a question for ye Hiccup, and I want an honest answer: does the village of Berk take part in the summer raids?"

Hiccup looked at her, there wasn't suspicion in her eyes, just a look of acceptance, as though she couldn't think of a reason why they wouldn't. He kept his eyes on her, to allow her the chance to read the truth from them. "As a whole, the village of Berk does not take part in the summer raids." She sighed and smiled, Hiccup's expression however, remained somber, causing her grin to melt. "As a whole no, but I will be honest with you, there are some that do."

He gave her time to take that news in, knowing that he was entering dangerous territory. She had every right to be angry, he had heard the stories of victory from other Vikings, his people, and knew the reality for her people was not so great. He watched as she stared up into the sky, her expression forelorn. He felt a strange urge put his hand over hers in comfort, but he clenched his hands together to resist and turned his focus onto the Terrible Terror who was sauntering over to them.

"Hello Terror" she said to the dragon.

"I've seen this guy following you around, does he have a name? " He asked, trying to veer the conversation away from the raiding season for the time being. Merida smiled as she stroked the bright green scales.

"No, ye'll probably laugh, but I was trying not to get too attached to anyone or anything in Berk, so I just kept calling him Terror and in the end that feels like the best name for him."

Hiccup did smile a bit, "I must have been annoying, trying to get you to becoming attached- Not that you're attached to me, just that I... invited you to dinnerâ€¦ and followed you around..."

He knew his face must look as red as it felt, so he tried to hide it by looking away from her. When she responded though he heard the smile in her voice.

"Seemed! I was \_convinced \_that ye were purposely following me to out me. How did ye figure out that I wasn't a Viking? It can't have been in workroom, ye spoke in Gaelic to me there first."

Hiccup felt a bit of pride in himself for figureing it out, he looked back at her "your names, they aren't really Viking sounding."

"Oh and I suppose Hiccup would have been better" she smirked.

"Ha, I'll have you know that my name helps me fight against trolls!"

Merida gave him an alarmed look, "Ye have trolls too?" She asked as she looked around, surveying the valley.

"No, no! I mean, at least not that I know of. You don't have tales of trolls where you come from?"

Merida frowned at him, "oh aye, we do, I just feel as though I've walked into another realm what with dragons being real. Though I guess magic shouldn't be that foriegn to me, I did turn my mother into a bear when I was younger." She gave him a sideways glance, obviously positive that would get a shock out of him. Hiccup didn't

let her down; he stared at her as though she had gone mad.

"A bear...?"

"Yep! Thanks to a witch woman who gave me a spell."

He ran his fingers through his hair, "well when you say it that way, of course it makes sense." She stuck her tongue out at him with a smile.

"Did ye want to hear that tale?"

He let out a breath and leaned back against the rock "M'lady, I don't think I could move until I hear this tale, besides I've already told you mine."

She gave him a soft smile "aye, ye have."

\* \* \*

><p>After that the two of them made their way back to the village. Merida slipped back to her hut so that she could change. Along the way Hiccup had mentioned his concerns about other people learning about who she really was and they both agreed that she should keep up the act while in public.<p>

Hiccup went to his place to find Toothless; he had offered to take her flying again. As he walked he thought about the various solutions to getting Merida off the island, but almost all of them still involved a ship, and until the long ships returned from the mainland he didn't have a lot of options. He looked up in time to see Peadar making his way towards him. Hiccup felt himself immediately tense up, he wasn't sure how much the man knew of Merida's plan this morning, but he was sure it was most of it.

"Hiccup, out for a walk in the woods?" Peadar was giving him a studied look.

"Yes, I ran into Meridaâ€| Weâ€| uh, well she went back to the hut to change." Peadar smiled then and clapped him heavily on the shoulder.

"Good then! Anyways, I wanted to invite you over to our humble dwelling for a meal tonight, if you were interested. I have some interesting news that involves the three of us."

Hiccup nodded, "sure, sounds good. I'll see you tonight then."

"Where are you heading off too now?" Peadar asked.

"Ah, I was going to go see Toothless, ask him if he was interested in giving Merida a tour of the island" as the words were leaving his mouth he felt his face go red. He realized that it sounded like he was courting Merida.

Peadar laughed loudly at his apparent discomfort "It's alright boy, off with you then" he finished, turning to walk back towards the shore. Hiccup watched him leave before turning back towards his house wondering what news he had.

Once he got home he found his father seated in front of the unlit fireplace, staring into it. He felt a trickle of fear, immediately knowing that something was very wrong.

"Dad? Is everything okay?"

Stoick shifted in his seat at Hiccup's voice and twisted around to face him. He sighed heavily and turned back towards the fireplace.

"I have something to tell you son, sit down." It wasn't a request; Hiccup took a seat, feeling like a child again.

"It has to do with Yngvild, I wanted to try and handle this situation and spare you, but I can't find a way out of it. Everything has changed so much since we began training dragons: the world feels more complicated. I've never had to deal with the threat of the entire Viking council before." He finished, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Hiccup frowned "What do you mean? Vikings threatening us?"

"I received a letter from Yngvild, after we left the council they took a secret vote: we either help them on the raid with our dragons, or we forfeit our position on the council. He arrives in a weeks' time for his answer."

"No! He can't do that!" Hiccup balled his fists as he looked about the room wild eyed for a proper response to this news. He searched his head for an idea, but then deflated, realizing that the answer wasn't going to come immediately.

He felt responsible for everything that was happening; once again he was a catalyst for problems on the island. He thought about Merida, how he wasn't even able to come up with an immediate solution to her problems either. If he could just get her back to her fatherâ€!

An odd idea passed through him; so odd he wasn't sure if he should say it out loud. He considered it for a few more moments before looking at his father, excitement building.

"What if we could make a treaty with someone else?" Stoick looked up at his son in confusion.

"Whom could we possibly make a treaty with? We're Vikings, if you haven't noticed many of our people raid other shores often, there aren't many that would jump to our aid easily."

"Ah ha! Yes, maybe not easily, but you agree that it might be an option. We both know that the surrounding villages don't like how Yngvild has been behaving; we could create a defense treaty so that we defend one another. Alone Berk would be in trouble, but united we stand a chance." he smirked as his father grumbled.

"How would we defend each other without using dragons?"

"We're Vikings! We have ships and warriors; you've complained to me that many of the villagers were getting restless for battle."

He seemed to be thinking it over "while it isn't a bad plan, you are asking only four villages to stand up against the possible might of the mainland clans, we are still a small mustering."

"Ah! That is where the second half of my plan comes into play: we treat with Alba." Stoick looked at him as though he had lost his head.

"Even if we could son, how would we make this magical treaty happen within the short period of time between now and Yngvild's arrival on our island?"

Hiccup opened his mouth and then closed it quickly. He had gotten so excited about the idea of a treaty with Merida's people that he had almost forgot that no one else knew who she really was.

"Exactly, the place closest to us anyways is the Orkney Isles and they are treating with Alba or so the rumours go, after the raids that happened last summer, Alba will want nothing to do with us. We are on our own son and running out of time. If Yngvild arrives, I'm sorry to say this, but I am going to accept his terms. We may not be able to convince you, but we have a dragon squadron that will follow my command!"

"No! No, you can't do this! Dragons are not swords you use when you want to threaten people! We can't risk their lives!"

"They are a part of our clan Hiccup, which means they are just as involved with the village as any person is. I don't think of my dragon as an item, he is my friend, and I know that he would do whatever he could to help keep this island safe."

Hiccup stood up, frustration pricking at his eyes. "Don't you understand what will happen if we use dragons to raid the shores of others? They will begin hunting dragons down! It won't be just about our dragons, you are threatening every dragon out there with a new war and a whole new group of people out for their blood!" He looked down at his father, who had remained seated, fury oozed through every inch of Hiccup.

Stoick let out a heavy breath, his shoulders dropping. Although physically he was a larger man, for the first time in Hiccup's life he questioned when his father had begun to look smaller than he remembered.

"Once again you are asking me to choose between the safety of Berk, or that of nameless dragons. Last time I let my rage get the better of me and you proved me wrong. This timeâ€ This time I will give the decision to you son."

Hiccup leaned back in surprise, unsure what he father was saying, but fearing he had an idea.

"It is time that you are tested with the mantle of Chieftain, so I give this problem to you since it affects you so heavily." Stoick stood up then, looking every bit the weary yet proud Viking Chieftain. "You will learn what it is like to carry the lives of this village and recognize the that choices you make are no longer only about your needs. Whatever you decide, I will support."

With that Stoick walked out the door, leaving Hiccup standing next to the empty fireplace, reeling with his father's words, he stared into the charred stone for answers to this new problem.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>End Note:<strong>

Thank you everyone that has reviewed and helped keep me motivated as I struggled with this one! You guys are the best!

## 11. Chapter 11

Yay! It continues finally!

\* \* \*

><p>Merida rushed in through the entrance to her hut, pausing only long enough to let Terror in before she closed the door behind her. She stood still for a moment, staring at the cold fire pit before emitting a long sigh. This morning's events replayed in her head as she made her way to the back of the room to change.</p>

Once she was in her breeches, and loose fitting top, she lifted the dress she had worn with care and folded it up: it was now filled with more meaning than when she had first donned it. After it was safe with the rest of her meager belongings she dragged herself to her pallet and dropped onto the wooden surface with a slight grimace at the hardness.

A sense of tension lingered within her chest, yet she couldn't find the source. She had confronted Hiccup, who was going to help Peadar and her get home without raising suspicion, and she had learned that most of Berk did not take part in the summer raids. These were good things: so why did she feel anxious?

Terror nipped at her ankle, pulling her out of her thoughts. She frowned down at the small dragon. "What is it now boyo?" The dragon licked his lips and scratched at the basket where they kept some food. Merida smiled and rolled her eyes as she pulled out some dried meat and fed it to him.

She was supposed to meet up with Hiccup again, but part of her felt exhausted. She longed to allowed herself a break, but another part of her looked forward to flying with Hiccup again. She took out a comb and began to try and tame her hair; if she was going to be flying she should at least plait it.

Just as she was finishing he front door open, she glanced up and watched Peadar stride in. The man stopped when he saw her.

"Ah, Merida" he looked outside in case anyone was nearby and then closed the door. "I just ran into Hiccup, I assume everything went well then?"

Merida knotted the cord to tied off her plait and dropped her hands. "Aye, everything went fine." She said quietly.

"Then what's the matter lass?" Peadar took a seat on his cot on the

other side of the hut. He placed his hands under his chin and waited. She leaned back on her pallet and looked up to the ceiling.

"I thought I would feel more relieved after I revealed the truth to him, but instead I feel conflicted. Hiccup didn't take me up on the challenge, he just... accepted me. There is something nagging me about how easy it was and I can't place it."

When she glanced towards her companion, he was studying her, which made her stomach feel as though it were being tied in knots. She had seen this look on his face when he watched her interacting with her suitors back home.

Although Merida wasn't supposed to know she had deduced that her mother had asked him to observe any courting activities when her suitors had visited, not just as a chaperon, but to see if she was growing attached to any of them. Peadar had a talent for reading and learning about people. Merida had a sneaking suspicion that he did a lot more than keep an eye on her for her mother though.

"So yer upset because ye've grown attached then?"

Merida sat up straight and frowned at him. "I haven't, I just, well..."

Peadar smiled at her.

"It's okay Merida, I've grown attached to this village as well. The people here are good folk."

Merida looked down at her hands. She knew that Peadar was right; she had discovered this reality last night when she had dragged Hiccup into their hut to silently fume at him. She thought of the aftermath of this morning's confrontation and how relaxed she had started to feel around him.

The knots in her chest drew tighter, a sense of panic began to take hold. She swallowed it back and did her best to ignore it. She realized that Peadar was still watching her, as though he were waiting for a confession of sorts. Instead she thought of something else to say in order to avoid saying out loud what the small voice in her head whispered.

"Peadar, although Hiccup said that he would help us, I still want to try and find our own solution for getting off of this island. I don't want to put the burden of this on him completely, and in the end it might be better to slip away when no one notices."

"Aye lass, we will continue to find a way off of here. However, have you thought about what ye want after we get back home?"

Merida cocked her head to the side in confusion "What do ye mean? We'll be home!"

"Do ye mean to never set foot on Berk again?"

Merida opened her mouth to say no, but a part of her hesitated. She frowned, had she really changed this much because of one Viking?

"I don't know" she sighed, staring into the cold charred wood of

their fire pit. "I should get going though, I told Hiccup I would come find him after I changed."

"Okay. Merida!"

She looked at him in question; he seemed to be thinking carefully about what to say next.

"Justâ€| Tis a good thing that yer learning to judge others for who they are, not where they are from, and that yer growing some attachment to... Berkâ€| But, don't get too attached. Yer still a princess, as much as I know ye wish ye weren't."

Merida blinked, confused for a moment about what he was implying. But after a moment she put the pieces together and felt her face grow warm.

She chuckled. "Pedar, honestly, if I haven't gotten attached to the boys back home, why do you think I'll get attached to one here?" She joked, a false smile tugging at her lips to hide the increasing uneasiness that had decided to take up permanent residence inside her chest.

He blinked, his own smile sad, "because, unlike the boyo's back at home, yer not trying as hard to keep him at an arm's length. I know it's because ye don't have to worry about him as a suitor, butâ€| just be careful."

Merida scoffed "I know what my duty is Pedar" she replied sharply before heading out the door.

The sun warmed her as she walked towards Hiccup's house at the top of the hill. Several people in the village hailed her while she walked by, and she found herself offering a smile and a wave back.

As she came up to Hiccup's house she saw him come out the front door, a frown on his face as he ambled down the steps. Merida was about to ask him if he was okay, but stopped herself short, reminding herself that while they were in the village she was still the mute Viking girl.

Hiccup looked up and noticed her there; he gave her a quick, tight, smile. "Hey Merida, shall we head over to Toothless?"

She nodded, then gestured: asking if everything was okay. Hiccup smile seemed to grow more and more forced.

"Yes, it's okay," he replied before walking ahead.

Merida frowned at his back, feeling a touch put out that he brushed her off, but took a deep breath and reminded herself that he was a Chieftain's son and that she was just a visitor, she couldn't expect him to tell her everything. Still, there was a part of her that wanted to help him if something was upsetting him.

They walked in silence, Hiccup seeming lost in thought leaving Merida unsure of what to talk about. Although they had communicated a little bit while they had been hunting together for the past few days, she didn't know that much about his personal life save Toothless. She wondered if he was in a relationship. Although she hadn't seen anyone

hanging around him, but she knew that Astrid had a lover in a nearby village: it could be the same for him.

As these thoughts formed she began to feel more and more apart from Berk. She had instinctively felt that everything would be easier now, that she would be an equal, but that wasn't the case.

She looked down and frowned, she was doing precisely what Peadar had just warned her against. Although they were nicer Vikings, she should still make sure to keep a certain amount of distance, she couldn't afford to get caught up in their affairs when she had her own to deal with. It wasn't like she was going to be moving here. No, she was going back to Alba, and was going to marry one of the lord's sons back home. The chance of visiting Berk again was slim.

She was so caught up in her thoughts that she crashed into Hiccup, who had stopped walking. She rubbed her nose and gave him a sharp poke in frustration. He straightened and turned to her with troubled eyes. She felt herself soften in response; her earlier thoughts confirmed that there was something bothering him.

After a moment of hesitation she placed a hand on his arm and gestured with her other hand in concern. He looked at her and gave her a small smile.

"I'm sorry that you still have to pretend" he whispered.

Merida rolled her eyes, after a month of not communicating to people in the village verbally she could survive, she was pretty sure that wasn't the real issue he was having.

He opened his mouth to say something else, but then closed it with a snap. Merida warred with herself, on one side she wanted to pester him for more information concerning what was bothering him, but Peadar's words kept echoing in her mind and held her in a tight grip of fear of getting too close.

After a moment Hiccup cleared his throat, there was a spark of determination bleeding through his troubled look.

"I can't take you flying just yet, something has come up and I need to talk to my friends now before any of them leave the island." He paused again, running his hand through his hair. "I'm going to be saying some surprising things, just, I will talk to you about this in more detail after, but my friends have to come first, I hope you understand."

Merida was unsure what to make of this speech, so she simply shrugged and gestured for him to lead the way.

Hiccup headed towards the dragon training arena, along the way he questioned a couple of villagers of the whereabouts of his friends, and requested that some of them be told to head to the arena when they could.

Merida followed, a silent shadow, as she observed Hiccup. This was the first time she had paid any attention to him in the village; she saw the respect that he received from the villages' citizens even though he didn't seem to see it. He wasn't a leader like her father: Fergus walked with the confidence of age and wisdom from ruling for

several years. In contrast Hiccup was always a touch hesitant. However, she observed now that he was far more confident when he had a task to accomplish.

A smile touched her lips as she squinted at him, picturing an older man standing tall, with thoughtful green eyes, and surrounded by friends willing to risk everything for the man that they trusted. He would be a great Chieftain, she was sure. The smile dropped after a moment, replaced with a gnawing sense of sorrow that she would probably never see that man.

Eventually they reached the arena where they met with Astrid, Fishlegs and Ruffnut. Hiccup hailed them and mentioned that he had something important to talk about, but that he wanted everyone to be there first. Once Tuffnut and Snotlout arrived Hiccup pulled them all to the side, near where the dragons were housed. He stared through the open door and watched some of the large scaled creatures within. Merida continued to observe from a distance, she hadn't strayed into their inner circle, choosing instead to lean against a nearby wall.

Hiccup took a deep breath, he looked her way before turning his attention to his friends.

"Yngvild is coming to Berk in a week."

This was met with a collective gasp. Merida felt the blood drain from her face, she turned her head away from the group to hide the shock of this news. Fear bit into her core and she pressed her back further against the wall, willing it to support her.

"Yngvild is coming here and has issued an ultimatum to my father: either we join the summer raids with our dragons, or we will be officially stripped from the coastal council."

Merida's head whipped back to the group and she found herself staring at Hiccup in shock. Her fear for her safety fleeing with the realization of how precarious a position Hiccup's father was in.

"Soâ€| we are going to have to do it, aren't we?" Snotlout's voice was tight as he gazed at a large red scaled dragon nearby.

"No!" Ruffnut spat "there is no way that we're going to allow our dragons to be used to terrorize people. I'd rather face the force of the mainland in fair and equal battle" she finished tugging at one of her braids. Tuffnut crossed his arms as he stood next to his sister, nodding in agreement.

Hiccup offered them a light smile and then turned to Fishlegs and Astrid, "how do you two feel?"

Fishlegs fidgeted "I don't really like either option, but I don't want Meatlug being forced to hurt innocent villagers, I mean that was what Red Death had done to them wasn't it? It was what led to our war against dragons in the first place, them being forced to fight for someone else."

Astrid stared up at the ceiling as her friends made their stand, Merida wondered if the woman was worried about what this trouble

would mean for her partner in the other village. However, once Fishlegs had finished talking, Astrid placed a hand on Hiccup's shoulder. "We're with you Hiccup, you're our future Chieftain." Hiccup placed a hand over Astrid's before dropping it and turning to look at them in turn.

"Okay, well, I said as much to my father: that I didn't want dragons being used for raiding. As such I've been given my first task, as future chieftain, to make a choice on behalf of Berk." He paused to allow his friends a chance to take this in. "I've thought about it, and an idea came to me when I was talking with my father, but it is a bit risky and will require all of you to make it work."

His friends stood a bit straighter, awaiting their orders. Hiccup glanced over at her, she saw that hint of fear creep back into his eyes. She gave him a small smile, and a nod, in hopes of sending some silent strength. He returned the gesture briefly before taking a breath and looking back to the group.

"I want to try and create a treaty with the surrounding villages against Yngvild. Together we represent more seats on the coastal council, and if we can convince them that we will help protect them against him, I know that we can work towards overruling Yngvild's control. He has made enemies through threats, and there are many that don't like that he is trying to gain control of the stretch of water between the mainland and Alba. I need you to go and treat with the other chieftains on my behalf, I can't make it to all of them before Yngvild gets here, but if we divide and conquer we will have more of a chance."

Astrid frowned "This isn't just a bit risky, this is very risky. We don't know if they will agree. Even if they do there is no way of knowing if we'll be able to convince the others on the council to vote against him. What happens if Yngvild stops trade ships from coming? Not having access to trade goods, when you live on an island with few resources, is an easy way to earn back control."

Hiccup nodded in agreement "yes, I know. That is why we were hoping to treat with the Orkney Isles. However, I still think it is possible for us to do just that. While you are out talking to the other Chieftains I am going to take Toothless and fly directly to the Isles to treat with their ruler. He was willing to talk with us before, I know that I can convince him to reconsider an agreement with Berk."

Merida opened her mouth, but closed it with a snap, and reminded herself that she couldn't talk. She closed her hands into fists, and dug her nails into her palms to keep herself under control. There was a flaw in his plan, he had to know that, her people were treating with the Orkney Isles. Her father and the others of Alba wouldn't stand by calmly if their new trading partner was helping their enemy.

Hiccup glanced at her again, she met his gaze and frowned, trying to convey her thoughts mentally to him. He scratched the back of his head with a grimace at her look.

"I have a feeling that I might be able to make a bigger \_deal\_ with the leaders on the Isles."

"Leader, there is only one on the Orkney Isles" Fishlegs said, instinctively correcting Hiccup.

Hiccup took this chance to give Merida another pointed glance: she realized that he was trying to tell her something too. She thought back to what he had said and the weight of what he was hinting at struck her: he wanted to treat with her people as well.

"So when should we go?" Tuffnut asked stretching, making it obvious that he wanted to leave right away. Hiccup smiled once more at his friends and then began laying out the plans.

Merida looked up at the sky and tried to think how she could help them, but the idea of anyone from Alba being interested in treating with Vikings didn't find a stable home in her mind.

She glanced at Hiccup, he was giving orders, but she paid no mind to what was being said, instead her thoughts were on how she could help him. She was pretty sure that she could convince her father, but it would take time before they could get the other lords to even consider: unlessâ€!

An idea planted itself in her unwilling mind. It would never be the path that she wanted in life, but if she could at least use it to help Hiccup, perhaps it wouldn't be so bad.

Merida drew herself up straight, a new resolve filled her. This would be her choice, her sacrifice. For the first time she felt that it was something she was doing to fulfill her own desires, not just as a puppet to her parents and the other lords.

## 12. Chapter 12

I don't own any of these worlds/characters save Peadar.

Hey, update! This is dipping into a different perspective!

Thank you so much for the comments, likes and follows! It makes me happy to know that people enjoy this story and I hope that I can do my best to make it a good one. :)

Now onto the story!

Peadar opened up his hip pouch and drew out a few thin birch twigs. They were the size of his thumb and fairly simple looking, but when you looked closer there were delicate runes carved into the sides. They marked the first messages he had received since he and Merida has ended up on Berk. He fingered one at a time, deciphering the markings and organizing his plans for the evening with each bit of news

Terror leapt up onto his pallet and curled next to the man, Peadar gave the tiny beast a smile and stroked its warm scales. He really hoped that it would be okay if they could take the small creature back home with them, he was growing just as attached to him as Merida was. A snort broke the silence in the hut as he thought of the Lady Dunbroch's reaction of them arriving with a dragon; Lord Fergus and the boys would love him though.

He glanced over the small scripts once more, but quickly replaced them into his pouch when he heard footsteps heading towards the door. He glanced at the entrance as Merida burst in, a resolute look upon her face, followed closely by a guilty looking Hiccup.

"Hello there Hiccup, have ye gotten yerself in trouble again?" He said smiling.

Hiccup grimaced and simply shrugged his shoulders while keeping his troubled eyes on Merida, who was pacing by the fire pit now, chewing her nail as she let her thoughts stay on whatever issue she was having. Peadar cleared his throat to try and get her attention, but she raised a hand to him without looking, gesturing that she needed a moment.

He sat up a bit straighter on his pallet, a frown forming when he realized that this wasn't a small issue if Merida hadn't even started speaking yet. He stole a glance at the Viking, he wanted answers as to why the lass was troubled, and if he couldn't get it from her he would get it from Hiccup.

"Tell me what happened" he commanded in a quiet voice, Hiccup looked down at him, he ran a hand through his hair.

"I may have based an entire idea of saving my village on the hopes that I could make a treaty with Alba."

Peadar's eyes widened and for the first time in a while he found himself lost for words. Hiccup gave him an apologetic look "I know, I know. Anyways, I didn't tell Merida about the idea ahead of time, I just sort of ran with it."

"Okay, wellâ€| Why don't we go back to the point of yer village needing saving? Why is that?"

Hiccup took a seat on the edge of Merida's pallet and began describing the problem that he and his father were facing. Peadar listened and kept his face blank. Once he had gotten the gist of the issue he allowed Hiccup to continue to talk while he quickly placed this information in line with the recent news he had received. Little did the Viking lord know that his idea may be more possible than he thought.

Once Hiccup had finished talking Peadar glanced over to Merida, she was looking at Hiccup with a look that made Peadar's heart clench in sadness for the girl. Her mother had tasked him to keep an eye out for impending choices when it came to Merida's possible marriage, any sign of which lad the girl showed interest in, but she had always fled from them. He could see that she was falling for Hiccup though, it wasn't that serious yet, but her heart would still break when they had to leave.

"Merida, ye obviously have something on yer mind concerning this matter, would ye care to share?"

She looked at him, her expression transforming into one of sadness, determination and laced with fear that he had only seen on her when she was thinking of her inevitable marriage. Something clicked into place as he matched this expression with Hiccup's idea.

"I think we can help Hiccup. I can convince my father, but it is the other Lords that will be the problem. I think I may be able to try and convince them, or at least one of themâ€œ by going ahead with my arranged marriage."

Peadar glanced over at Hiccup; the lad was looking at her in disbelief.

"If I choose Macguffin's son we could make a strong case for it. Their land is the one that has been worse off since the raiding has begun again, if we can get him on our side the others will follow."

Hiccup leapt to his feet "you don't have to do this! I mean, I don't really know much about your position when it comes toâ€œ \_marriage\_, but I don't want you to make a choice to help my village!"

Merida gave him a small smile "I'm going to have to choose one of them eventually, I may as well make it a choice based on my own needs and not just theirs."

Peadar felt proud of her, but also sad. When he had returned to Dunbroch after being away for many, many years he had come face to face with a rebellious Merida who had replaced the small lass he had remembered.

She hadn't remembered him, but he wasn't surprised, she had only been three when he had left Alba to begin his work for Fergus. He hadn't been sure, as he got to know the grown Merida, whether she would ever take politics seriously: but here she was making her moves on the battle field.

"How will yer marriage get MacGuffin to agree to a treaty with Vikings?" He parried.

Merida smirked, recognizing the challenge, "simple, Berk will give us foreknowledge of impending attacks so that we are prepared for them."

"Oh will they now? What happens when someone on their council starts to question how Alba is always a few steps ahead? It won't take them long to start pointing fingers."

Merida faltered with this, but Hiccup took this chance to jump into the fray.

"We may not be able to give you the exact locations, but the general area. All we need is this treaty to hold until we can take Yngivld down a peg on our end. Convince the Lords of Alba that it is a temporary truce at least." Peadar crossed his arms and shook his head with a small smile.

"Not enough lad, empty promises. I don't know if that is enough to sway them." He said.

Merida shook her head. "It will be. MacGuffin has been hoping that I would choose his son, I can make it part of the bargain for my hand." Peadar noted Hiccup's expression become closed off as the lad turned and looked away from her. He obviously wasn't happy with this choice, but he was trapped with the weight of his village on his shoulders.

Pedar felt himself warming to the man more and more; he would make a great Chieftain one day.

Pedar knew that Merida would have to make up her mind one day, he only wished it could've been for love and not completely due to politics.

He realized that he couldn't keep his knowledge secret any longer though, or they'd risk more trouble upon this island. "I have some news that may change things. I have heard word that your father is sailing to Berk as we speak."

Both Merida and Hiccups face looked equally shocked.

"How can that be? I haven't heard anything about this!" Hiccup exclaimed. The young man gave Pedar a calculated look, "how could you find out about this news before I have?"

"He had been talking with the other fishermen from the nearby villages" explained Merida. Hiccup shook his head, his frown deepening.

"The closest village is about half a day by Dragon and a whole day by boat, we don't meet up with the other villages that often, and even then we are the closest to your land so we would be bringing news like that to them."

Merida looked at him with shock, but he could see the wheels turning as she put the pieces together. "But that doesn't make sense!" Pedarâ€œ I know you've mentioned having a lot of contacts, but who were you talking to if-!" A look of understanding flashed in her eyes. Pedar knew he was in trouble now. "My father's right hand man, but ye leave for years shortly after he became kingâ€œ All of those contacts, yer journeys to surrounding landsâ€œ"

"Before you say anything malady, ye have to understand that I didn't tell ye because it was yer parents wish that ye not know."

Merida huffed "that is typical of them, but for ye not to trust me with the knowledge after we ended up here? What would have happened if we had never gotten back home? "

"I knew we would get home, it was always just a matter of time, but if we were really trapped then I would have told ye"

Hiccup coughed to draw their attention, "would someone care to fill me in?"

Merida chewed her lip for a moment and looked to Pedar for permission. He sighed, knowing that Fergus wouldn't be happy, but he couldn't think of a way around it now. Nodding, he took a seat and looked to the young Viking as Merida gave him the news.

"It would appear that Pedar is working for my father as more than a second in command: he is a spy."

"What?" Hiccup gasped, Pedar winced, the knowledge of what he was never went well when revealed, and while he trusted Hiccup for the most part, he wasn't too sure how the young Viking would take having a spy in their midst.

"Before ye say anything Hiccup, I wasn't sent here, Merida and I did end up here quite by accident." Hiccup stared at him for a moment longer, processing the information. After a moment he nodded and began pacing the small space between the door and the pallets.

After a moment he stopped and looked at the two of them. "If Merida's father is sailing here we can get the treaty moving earlier."

"Aye, we can make way to the ships as soon as we wish." Peadar responded.

"The sooner the better, we don't want to risk war between my father and yours" Hiccup said looking to Merida.

Merida looked towards Terror, her hair falling to cover her expression. "Yes, as soon as possible would make the most sense." Peadar's heart went out to the lass, he knew that she was getting far more attached than she would allow herself to realize.

"How soon do you think we could make way then? I'm assuming ye'll want to join us?" Peadar asked Hiccup who was still looking at Merida with a closed expression.

After a moment Hiccup blinked and looked towards Peadar. "We can leave at first light tomorrow, if you think that is wise: you know how much time we have before Merida's father reaches our shores."

Peadar nodded, "first light is plenty of time. We'll take a boat out and make out way over while you follow on Toothless."

Merida looked up then, Peadar couldn't see her expression, but Hiccup did and gave her a small smile and a nod.

"If it is okay with you Merida, and you as well Peadar, I wouldn't mind taking Merida on Toothless."

Peadar knew in his gut that allowing these two to get any closer was a risk, but he also knew that Merida would never settle for a boat when she could fly.

"I will fly with ye Hiccup!" Merida smiled, turning to give Peadar a fierce look to know that he wouldn't be able to fight her on that.

He simply smiled and bowed his head. "It is settled then, tomorrow we go see yer father about a treaty."

### 13. Chapter 13

Merida couldn't sleep that night. She had joined Hiccup at the main hall for dinner with his friends, and listened as they all made plans to leave the next day. However, he hadn't mentioned his travel plans to them yet. After they had finished the business talk the conversation turned towards humour and stories of their day. Merida had smiled at the jokes, and placed a hand on Fishlegs arm in comfort as he told them that an elder dragon had passed on that day. She had felt more comfortable compared to the first time she had eaten with

them.

The night had taken an odd turn when Terror had crawled between Merida and Hiccup. Hiccup proceeded to feed him treats while Merida stroked his warm scales. At one point Hiccup had gone to give him a pat, but, by accident, had placed his hand over Merida's.

She had nearly leapt out of her seat in surprise at the warmth of his hand, which had sent a surge of feelings into her belly that left her confused. She had snatched her hand back quickly and looked up at Hiccup to see that he was sitting stiffly, keeping his eyes from meeting hers.

She had felt quite aware of his presence after that moment, ensuring that she was never close enough for it to happen again. Never before had she experienced the sea of emotions that churned in her gut in that moment, and something told her that she didn't want to dwell on them for long. She reminded herself that they were leaving in the morning, and that she would be putting Berk and its inhabitants behind her. They would simply another chapter in her life.

However, once she had gotten home she had found that her emotions didn't want to follow what her brain was demanding, and as a result she tossed and turned.

Finally, after a few hours had passed she gave up the pretense of sleep. She shifted out of her bed, making sure to keep her actions as quiet as possible so as not to wake up Peadre.

She changed out of her night shift and into her tunic, vest and leggings, tying her belt into a knot and securing the small kitchen knife she had taken so long ago. She tip toed by Terror and opened the door just enough to slip through.

Once the door to the hut was closed she took a deep breath of the salty air, she drew her fur vest closed against the chill that came with being out in the wee hours of the night. Merida didn't know where to go, with the exception of a few guards, most people on Berk were asleep in their homes now.

She wandered through the empty paths and looked up at the skies and thought of her home. Her mother would be close to giving birth now. Merida hoped that she wasn't too worried about her and her father, the last thing Elinor needed to do was stress any more than usual. She felt the sliver of homesickness worm itself against the other feelings that had been plaguing her, reminding her that she had a real home that she needed to return to.

A sigh escaped her as she accepted that there was always going to be a part of her that didn't want to leave though. After a month of pretending at being a Viking, there was a part of her that she had been trying to ignore. That part had felt more at home here then she thought she would. Here there was a freedom from her duties as a princess, a simple life where she could just live as herself.

However, she wasn't completely herself here either in the end. Everyone in the village only knew her as a waylaid Viking, not as a princess from Alba. She wondered how different things would be if they knew the truth. She didn't like the idea that people would treat

her differently.

Merida walked past the training area for the dragon riders and paused to listen to the breathing and occasional growl from the dragons in their home. She would miss dragons too. Her heart ached at the thought of leaving Terror behind now, and wondered if she could ask Hiccup if she could keep him. A snort escaped her as she thought of her mother's reaction to the little dragon.

A whine snapped her out of her thoughts. She looked around, but couldn't find the source of it. It happened again and she realized that it was coming from a building nearby. Curiosity drove her in that direction, she peeked around the corner and came face to face with a pair of large, deep green eyes causing her to let out a little yelp as she fell back in surprise.

Toothless cocked his head in question at her reaction and looked over at his rider who was already muttering apologizes.

"Merida, I'm sorry, I figured you wanted to be left alone, walking around this late at night. I keep sneaking up on you when I don't mean to. I mean, I meant to once, but aside from that I didn't-!"

She placed a hand over his mouth to silence him, looking around to see if there was anyone nearby. After she didn't spot anyone she realized where her hand was and quickly withdrew it, using her hair to block his view of what was probably, an obvious blush forming on her cheeks.

"It's okay Hiccup" she whispered, "I was just having trouble sleeping." She glanced at him, his expression was closed off, guarded, the same look he had worn at dinner. "Are you okay?"

He blinked and then offered a small smile "yeah, I was feeling the same. There is a lot riding on tomorrow, and I am worried that I won't be able to make that treaty happen with your father."

"Ack, don't worry boyo! My father is an understanding man. And once he knows what I will offer to that deal, well it is sure to challenge any concerns that he might have."

Hiccup glanced around once more, putting a finger to his lips and pointing at a coming Viking. They waited until he had passed, keeping to the shadows of the house they were next to in order to hide themselves from view.

"You know, I never took you up on Toothless today like I promised. What do you say buddy? Feel up to a quick flight?" Toothless rumbled in agreement and looked to Merida. She smiled wide. "Alright then, let's get going!"

He hopped onto the back of Toothless and offered his hand to her, she accepted it and clambered up behind him.

The takeoff was smooth and silent, Merida gingerly held onto Hiccup's shirt trusting him and Toothless not to let her fall. The air was colder higher up, but the excitement of flying kept her mind off of it.

"I wanted to go somewhere we could talk without as much worry. No one really flies at night." Hiccup explained.

"So, what did you want to talk about?" She asked, leaning towards him so that her chin was practically resting on his shoulder in order to hear him better.

Hiccup cleared his throat and looked out ahead. The sun was just beginning to peek out from the horizon, it was hard to tell save for the subtle shift in the fabric on the night sky from the dark blue to purple.

"You mentioned, back at the hut, and again just now, that you were going to use this arranged marriage as a foothold for the treaty... I just, I didn't want you to force yourself to do something you didn't want to for us. The way you talked about it, it's as though you were talking about selling sheep... Err, no offense."

Merida dropped her shoulders and looked out at the sky as a band tightened over her heart. "Marriage in Alba is all about treaties, at least for the noble women." She sighed, "It was always intended that I marry one of the clan leader's sons. At least this way I worked things out so that the choice was actually my own." She looked down and picked at her vest "However, I've never felt anything for them. And to be honest, I don't think any of them like me either."

Hiccup was quiet for a while, Merida took the time to lean back and look up at the sky. She felt so good fly, up here she felt like she could go anywhere. There was part of her that wanted to urge Hiccup onwards, far off into the distance, until they were in a new land. Somewhere they could just escape to.

She glanced over to him and realized that he had been watching her. She expected him to turn back when she caught him, but he kept his gaze steadfast on hers. There was an emotion there that she couldn't name, or maybe just didn't want to, especially when she feared that the same emotion was reflected in her own eyes.

Peadre's warning swam through her head, and she cleared her throat as she sat up straight to break the moment. She had to remember why she was trying to escape in the first place and not allow herself to get caught up in this dangerous territory. She forced herself to look anywhere else, and instead settled her attention on Berk. From up here she could see the watch fires burning, casting light on the colourful roofs of the training building and dragon-nesting area. All of the houses seemed small as she searched the ground for her small hut.

"Berk is beautiful Hiccup, I'm sorry that we've brought a risk of trouble. I am using my arranged marriage to help it stay free: that is what I want for it. You're the future chief here anyways, it'll be good to create this treaty for the future."

Hiccup reached down to the side of his saddle and pulled a lever. Merida heard a clicking sound before it stopped in place. She glanced back to see the tail attachment on Toothless was now locked in an open position. Hiccup shifted in the saddle so that he could face her better. There was a look of loss in his eyes that she wished she could erase it, but she kept her hands to herself and merely cocked her head to the side in question.

"I appreciate your help, I really do, but... But don't chain yourself to something that you don't want..." He sighed and looked down at Berk. "To be honest, I always knew that my father would want me to become the chief, but just dealing with this one issue... I don't know if it is the kind of responsibility that I want to have in the future. Up here, flying with Toothless, this is all I've could ever want. Well... almost." He finished.

Merida felt her heart clench in understanding. She thought of all the times she had tried to escape the future that had been written out for her. However, with age came the growing realization that there wasn't an escape, that she would have to follow the rules of her world. It was frustrating and crushing in the end.

Without thinking she took Hiccup's hand in hers and gave it a squeeze. She couldn't find the words, but the way he looked at her, his expression mirroring her emotions, she knew he understood. After a moment he clutched her hand in return.

They stayed like that for a moment, until Toothless growled in panic, Hiccup snapped to attention and realized that they had been slowly sinking back down towards the water.

He turned himself back in place the quickly released the lever and guided Toothless back upwards. He patted the dragon's side.

"Sorry bud, looks like I still need to tweak that lock." Toothless grumbled in response causing Merida to laugh. She leaned around Hiccup and stroked Toothless in comfort.

"Thank you Toothless, you really are something special. It's unfortunate that you got stuck with this forgetful boyo" she ended, glancing up at Hiccup and sticking her tongue out. Toothless heaved a laugh in his dragon way while his rider scoffed, but simple smiled down at her after.

She adjusted herself back upright and placed a hand on Hiccup's shoulder, more for her own comfort than for security. "We should probably head back soon, the sun is coming up and Peadre will worry." She sighed.

Hiccup placed his hand over hers, he seemed like he wanted to say something more, but after a moment he turned and focused his attention back to flying them home.

Two hours later, and a little worse for wear due to the lack of sleep, Merida stood by the docks as Peadre prepped his small boat. They were waiting for Hiccup to come back from seeing off the others on their own trips, save for Astrid who was waiting another day before leaving herself.

She looked up at Berk and felt a stone settle in her gut, knowing it would probably be the last time she laid eyes on this collection of buildings, and the sight of dragons flying through the air. In her heart she didn't want to leave, but the thought of her mother, father and brothers created a conflict that didn't have a clean answer.

Peadre placed a hand on her shoulder in comfort and she turned to

face him, offering a small smile to let him know that she was okay.

"Everything will sort its self out, ye'll see" he muttered quietly, keeping an eye on those around him.

There was a shout as Hiccup called down to them from the back of Toothless. The black dragon gave them a gummy grin which Merida couldn't help but return. The two of them landed cleanly on the dock near them and Hiccup dismounted before heading towards them. After a moment another shadow flew over them as Astrid and Stormfly landed nearby.

"Hiccup, wait!" Astrid called out as she quickly dismounted and ran over to them.

"Astrid, what's wrong?"

"I heard from Fishlegs that you were heading out with Peadre to investigate the mystery dragon... Wait, why does Merida look like she is going?"

Merida looked down, she had tossed on a short cloak and sturdier boots for the voyage, although she liked flying, it had been a bit cold last night. She smiled and nodded at Astrid in response to her question.

The Viking woman looked horrified and turned a glare at Hiccup. "That dragon is dangerous and nearly killed her once! What are you thinking Hiccup? It would be better to take another dragon rider with you, I could assign you one of my trainees easily."

Hiccup looked a bit lost for words, Merida realized that her cover was what was stopping her from going, but she didn't know how Astrid would react to the truth, especially out in the open as they were. Merida chewed her lip when Hiccup looked to her for direction: he wouldn't reveal the truth without her permission.

Merida gave up searching for a clean answer and instead bowed her head and walked slowly towards Astrid. The woman looked apologetic, "Merida... I'm sure you can take care of yourself, but..." she sighed and placed her hands on Merida's shoulders "I just don't think the risk is worth it, and I'm sure your brother would agree" she ended giving Peadre a sharp look.

Merida glanced at him and she grimaced: there wasn't a way to give Astrid a valid excuse.

"You're right Astrid, it was silly of me... I just thought that we might be able to head back home with Hiccup and Toothless guiding us."

Astrid offered a small smile. "I know you both want to get home, but I still think it would be better to try with larger numbers. Once the others return we could try taking you back a group if you want. With more dragon riders we'd at least have more protection if we were attacked. That is, if Hiccup doesn't figure out a solution today."

Hiccup ran his fingers through his hair and shrugged his shoulders.

"Okay, it looks like it is just the three of us for this journey then. Astrid, can you make sure Merida is safe?"

Astrid cocked her head to the side with a frown, "er, sure, but she should be safe and sound on Berk."

Hiccup grasped Astrid's shoulders "please, just, promise me."

Astrid stood straight then, still frowning as she nodded, "I promise Hiccup."

Merida walked over to Peadre and gave him a hug. "Tell my dad that I'm okay" she whispered in his ear.

"I will. I'm sorry lass. We'll get this sorted as soon as we can and be back for you" he muttered back. She let him go and watched as he boarded the ship.

Hiccup walked over to her and placed a hand on her shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze. She met his eyes and read his apology and promise. She placed a hand over his and nodded.

He moved to head back to Toothless, but she stopped him and pulled out her wrapped bow from the bindings behind her back, thrusting it in his hands. She looked at him and urged him to understand. Her father would know that it was hers, and would trust Peadre. She needed to give Hiccup the best chance to make this treaty work, she needed to make her father understand that she supported this, even if she wasn't there.

Hiccup took the package and nodded once more, "thank you."

She stood by Astrid and watched the two of them leave: Peadre on his boat and Hiccup on Toothless. She stood there until she could no longer see them and Astrid finally urged her to come back into the village.

Merida glanced once more to the horizon feeling the loss of them keenly as she realized that she was truly alone on Berk now, no one here knew her secret. The two woman headed back with Stormfly walking alongside them.

"I'm sorry again Merida, but don't worry, I'll look out for you until your brother gets back." She grumbled as she glanced back towards the ocean in the direction Hiccup had left in. "Everyone here likes you so I don't know what Hiccup was so worried about."

Merida swallowed and nodded in response. Astrid peered her way and then sighed as her shoulders dropped "I feel like I've trapped you here against your will." She grew silent once more as though searching for something more to say. Then her eyes lit up as she smiled at Merida. "I know! Hiccup mentioned that you were quite good with a bow, do you mind showing me? It'll help pass the time and I've wanted to improve my abilities: the bow isn't a common weapon here."

She couldn't help but smile back. The woman's attempts to make her feel better were appreciated. She also wouldn't hold it against her for keeping her from the treaty talks: she had only been concerned for her safety. Merida nodded in response and gestured for Astrid to

lead the way.

They made their way to the practice yard, once there Merida went into the weapon's shed and searched amongst the bows for two serviceable ones. She already missed her handmade one despite the knowledge that it was helping Hiccup.

Once they had the targets set up and their equipment ready, Merida gestured towards Astrid to shoot first. She watched the Vikings stance as she fired, she wasn't a terrible shot, but there were some improvements she could make to increase her accuracy. After Astrid was out of arrows she went to gather them and then returned. Merida gestured for her to take aim, but not shoot. She then used her hands and foot to adjust Astrid's arm position and stance. Then she motioned for Astrid to breathe in time with her shot, showing her as she drew an imaginary bow and fired: the breath was important.

Astrid nodded and then took stance, keeping in mind the adjustments that Merida had made to it. She then fired and continued to find the center of the target more often. She smiled at Merida once she had run out of arrows again "that was amazing! Can I see you do it?"

Merida nodded and then got herself into position in front of the second target. She calmed herself, breathing slowly as she lifted the bow up before drawing it back. She looked past the target, knowing that her arrow would find its mark and then released. Without pause she drew another, and another, letting the song of the arrows cut through the wind as they dashed towards home. Once she was done she let out another breath and then turned to Astrid who stared in surprise.

"When Hiccup said you were good he was lying! You're amazing!" She tapped her chin as she looked Merida over "now, how about other weapons? Do you know how to use a sword?" Merida nodded. Astrid smirked "perfect! How about I test your other skills and you can show me how much of a fool I was when I thought it wouldn't be safe for you to go with Hiccup." She said with an apologetic smile.

Merida shook silently with laughter, but then sighed and sent a thought to Hiccup and Peadre, hoping that they were faring well in their quest.

They collected their arrows and were just returning the targets to the shed when the horn at the top of the main hill sounded, startled, both women looked towards it. After the sound died Astrid moved towards the gate of the practice yard so that she could look out at the horizon.

"One call, it means that there are friendly ships approaching. Odd, I didn't think we had any guests coming in for a while... Oh no."

Merida turned to look in the other direction from where Hiccup and Peadre had left. Sailing in from the north were three Viking ships. The shields draped over the sides and banner colours she recognized straight away for they were a sight out of her nightmares: Yngivld had arrived early to Berk.

Happy New Year all!

This chapter gave me a lot of headaches. I had written it, but then was unsure about it, so I re-wrote it, but then hated that and went back. It was thanks to my beta that I finally found some peace with this.

The next chapter is just being edited, so you actually won't have to wait months for it I swear. You can feel free to pester me on my tumblr (or just say hi if you want) here:

#### 14. Chapter 14

Before she realized what she was doing, Merida bolted. She knew had to find a place to hide and fast. She shut her eyes and sent a mental apology when she heard Astrid call out to her in confusion, but turned to make sure that the woman wasn't following her.

Astrid stood on the hillside watching her in concern, but someone ran up to her and seem to gesture towards the Chief who was waiting for her.

Merida turned her attention back to looking for a hiding spot. She headed towards the woods, knowing that she would be safer staying there then in the village itself, but as she ran by the kitchen a hand reached out and grabbed her. It was only thanks to the month of pretending that she couldn't speak that stopped her from shouting out in protest.

She looked up and met the grey eyes of Olaf. He glanced around before pulling her into the kitchen. Once there he shut the doors and looked out into the entrance to the grand hall before turning his attention back on her.

"Well then, it looks like you are in some trouble deary. Does Yngvild know you?"

Merida stood still, she didn't know how to react to his question.

"Well speak up girl, I know you can. You think I couldn't hear you and Hiccup whispering early this morning by my house? I always wake before dawn to head over here, I had my suspicions, but this morning confirmed them."

Merida felt the blood drain from her face as fear struck ice in her gut. Olaf blinked and then sighed.

"I ain't going to get you in trouble Merida. You're a good girl, and if Hiccup trusts you, I do as well. I understand why you kept it secret, that you're no Viking, but you don't have to fear me, I swear."

She swallowed and looked down, after a moment she took a breath and faced the cook. "I'm sorry for lying" she said in Norse. Olaf's eyes widened slightly, but he quickly recovered and started going through the pantry for supplies.

"We need to get you to safety, obviously Yngvild will know you, or

one of his men-"

"It is because I'm-"

He lifted a hand to stop her "no, nope. I am going to help you, but it is best I don't know any details. I trust you know some places to camp out at in the woods, I'll pack you enough to survive off of for a day or two. At that point Hiccup should have returned. Do you know a place where he could find you?"

Merida thought of the little valley. "Yes, he will know where to find me" she replied.

He tied off a small pack for her, also wrapping a small knife which he handed to her. "Keep this on you... Just in case."

She swallowed and nodded as she took the weapon. She tucked it into her boot and then took the pack from him, offering a smile in thanks. He nodded and then walked over to the door leading out of the kitchen. He looked around before motioning that it was clear.

"Cook! Cook! They told me I could get some food here! We've been on the water for days with nothing but dried meat!"

The voice caused both of them to jump, it was coming from the hall and getting closer. Olaf shoved her out the door.

"Good luck, now get going quickly!"

Merida nodded and turned to say thank you, but he had already shut the door. She shouldered the pack and glanced around before walking quickly towards the woods. She knew that she would have to pass by the Chieftain's house, but she was hoping he would be down greeting the visitors by now.

As she reached the final stretch of houses she tucked herself behind one and glanced out at the clearing. There wasn't anyone there, she sighed with relief and walked out and towards the trees. She felt a giddiness sweep over her as she got closer, the knowledge that she would be safe made her do a little skip.

She walked past the line dividing the village from the forest and sighed in relief. She turned back to look once more at the village, but noticed a group heading up towards Hiccup's house. She recognized Yngvild with a shudder and noticed Hiccup's father, who was looking a bit concerned as he talked rapidly to Gobber next to him. She wondered if Hiccup had even told his Father his plans.

She realized that she would be seen if she moved, so she ducked behind a tree and silently cursed herself for not hiding her bright hair. She glanced at the group, who had now stopped a few feet away from her, close enough that she could hear their conversation.

"I would have thought your son would be here Stoick, it is a bit rude." Yngvild growled.

Stoick glared in the man's direction, "my son had some important matters to attend to this morning. We've had trouble with a dragon along a certain stretch of ocean. You wouldn't know anything about it would you? So far you seem to have been the only person to have

sailed safely through there."

Yngvild grunted and ran a thumb over his sword hilt "Hn, I wouldn't say I survived it completely unscathed, those rabble from Alba destroyed one of my ships and as a result I lost men. But as for this dragon, no, I didn't see it."

Merida glared, that wasn't true at all! Yngvild's men had destroyed her ship, not the other way around. She took a breath to steady herself and kept an eye on them. After a moment though she heard a rustling in the bushes. Her hand went to the dagger in her boot as she turned to look for the source of the noise: after a moment Terror appeared and growled at her. She placed her finger to her lips in hopes of getting him to quiet down, but the dragon continued to kick up a fuss.

"Shh, Terror, I'm sorry I didn't take you with me, but ye need to be quiet" she whispered bending over to try and appease him. She looked over to see if the ruckus had drawn any attention, and jumped in surprise when she found all eyes on her.

She reacted without thinking, ducking into a small bow and then turning to walk into the woods. She heard the Chief tell the others who she was, and increased her speed in hopes of getting away before Yngvild might realize who she really was.

A sudden flurry of footsteps behind her sent her into a run without looking behind, in her heart she knew, she also knew that they would catch her.

Terror seemed to sense her panic and screeched at one of the men as they caught up to her. He puffed himself up and hurled a ball of fire in his direction, the man was caught off guard and yelled in panic as he stopped to pat himself down.

Merida pushed herself further, ducking around trees and using her knowledge of the forest to her advantage as she tried to escape the men. After a time the sounds of them stopped and she risked slowing to a stop to assess her situation. She jumped behind some rocks and looked behind her. The forest played its normal sounds, but aside from the birds there wasn't a sound of anyone else. She sank down to the ground with a sigh, lifting the panting Terror to her lap and stroking his scales.

"Thank ye Terror, I wouldn't have made it without you." After a little while of waiting to see if anyone was still coming, she finally felt relaxed enough to get up and make her way towards the valley.

The events of the day swam in her head making her feel numb, she felt lost and, if she was being honest with herself, afraid. She didn't know what to do except to lay low until Hiccup came back, but then what about Berk? Yngvild was here, he knew she was here, he would ask questions. What could Hiccup do in this situation that wouldn't cause risk to either her or his village?

Merida chewed on a nail as she walked, these worried thoughts plagued her and once she reached the entrance to the valley she stopped and looked back. She thought of Olaf, of Astrid and the others. She thought of Hiccup, whose greatest desire was to stop a war that could

cause harm to the dragons. Merida didn't want Toothless to get hurt, she looked down at Terror and thought of what could have happened when the little dragon had helped her.

"I have to go back Terrorâ€œ I have to turn myself in. If I do that I can prove that I duped them, that I was hiding here and it wasn't the fault of Hiccup or his father."

Terror chirruped and cocked his head to the side, Merida smiled sadly and bent down to pick him up. He struggled, but eventually acquiesced to resting on her shoulders. She pat his head, squared her shoulders, lifted her chin and turned back towards the village.

\* \* \*

><p>When she walked back into the village she expected more panic about her missing, but instead she found it quiet. As she passed by the kitchen she dropped Terror off and motioned for him to stay in place. The dragon grumbled, but for once seemed to listen to her.</p>

She took a deep breath to center herself and then walked, head held high, towards the docks where Yngvild's ships could still be seen. She had only made it halfway there when one of his men nabbed her from behind.

"Found you, Alban scum." He pulled her hands behind her and bound them quickly with cloth that he must have had on him. He searched her and pulled the knife from her boot and tucked it into his belt. Afterwards he marched her at sword point towards the dock. Others followed after they realized that their crewmate had found her, they called her names and cheered each other at the capture of the wild princess.

She noticed the Vikings of Berk watching this unfold: a mixture of confusion and worry written across their features. Merida met some of their eyes and offered a small apologetic smile, but for the most part kept her attention forward.

As they approached the docks Merida's eyes widened as she found Hiccup's father, Gobber and Astrid standing next to Yngvild. Their expressions were mixed between anger, sadness and an almost calculating look from Astrid.

She kept her head held high and chose to focus her attention on Yngvild. At least she hadn't allowed herself to get too close, it meant that they hadn't gotten attached to her either and it would make it easier for them to play their part.

"Well you have caught me" she said carefully in Norse. There was a look of surprise from Astrid when she spoke.

Yngvild sauntered over to her and tugged at a strand of her hair, it had become loose during her run in the woods. She kept her expression neutral, doing her best to mask her revulsion. Yngvild chuckled and then turned back to the chief.

"So this is where the princess had been hiding, right in the midst of a Viking village. This is what you get for not expanding your horizons Stoick. If you would join the raids more often you wouldn't

have been fooled by this girl. She can't have been on her own though, was there another? "

"There was, and he left with Hiccup" replied Astrid, the woman walked slowly up to her and grabbed Merida's arms roughly. "I pitied you! I allowed you to get close to Hiccup! He was suspicious of you from the start and I told him not to worry!" Astrid let her go and turned around for a moment. Merida thought she was done when Astrid suddenly spun around and punched her in the gut, hard.

Merida doubled over with gasp pain. Astrid then grabbed her shirt roughly, lifting her back up. "We're going to go find Hiccup and I better find him safe."

Merida looked Astrid in the eye, feeling sorry for making her feel as though she meant any harm to Hiccup. Merida knew that they were close and could understand the other woman's concern for her friend and future leader. However, when she met the Norse woman's eye, it wasn't anger that she read in her expression, but a subtle wink.

Merida blinked and cleared her throat as she stood up, there was a weight on her tunic that hasn't been there before. With her hands bound behind her she couldn't discover what Astrid had slipped into her person, but for the moment she felt something akin to hope bloom within her.

"Yngvild, with your permission I would like to sail with you and this treacherous scum. I'll take Stormfly with me so that you will have a dragon on your side should we run into trouble."

Merida glanced over at the Viking, he stroked his grey beard as he eyed Stormfly. After a moment he smiled and looked towards Merida.

"Well then, let's get you and your keeper on board so that we can get you home to your father. I'm sure he'll love to know that his daughter is safe in the hands of Yngvild." He sneered, motioning to his men to take her. They grabbed her arms and hoisted her up, she kicked and yelled out in protest, but knew that it wouldn't change anything.

She took one last glance at Berk, she met the eyes of Gobber who was muttering something fiercely to the Chief, but Hiccup's father was unreadable. She looked up at the dragons flying around the cliffs of the village, the colourful signs of the training yard, the cluster of houses adorned with their detailed carvings. In her heart, she hoped that this wouldn't be the last time she ever set foot here. With that thought she was dragged down into the dark of Yngvild's ship, towards an unknown future.

End  
file.